Author:
Bull, Steve J

Title:
The Use and Development of the Faerie Sign in Romance from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period

The Use and Development of the Faerie Sign in Romance from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period

Stephen Bull

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts.

School of Humanities

May 2020

71,025 words

Abstract

Within medieval and early modern romance, faeries frequently take on the appearance and customs of medieval courtly society, but they are also something distinctly other, existing on the fringes of the known world and unbeholden to either human or divine law. Faeries were ambiguous creatures whose appearance and function often defied categorisation. The absence of social or moral restrictions made them dangerous (although potentially rewarding) characters to be around, and so their incorporation into romance served to cultivate a sense of uncertainty amongst its audiences. However, there is also an extent to which faeries in romance conform to certain patterns, both in terms of the conventions that are used to identify them, and their purpose in relation to the shared construction of meaning within a text. The repeated themes and motifs that are used throughout romance to identify faerie characters and otherworldly settings are referred to throughout this thesis using the collective term the *faerie sign*. By identifying faeries in this way, the aim of this thesis is to focus on a broader range of examples than has been covered in previous studies on faeries in romance. By exploring different iterations of the faerie sign across selected medieval and early modern texts, my aim is to analyse how different authors engage intertextually with its conventions to propagate different meanings and agendas. Through the use of recognisable themes and motifs, the authors of these texts invited audiences to question the nature of the ambiguous otherworldly characters that populate romance (and other genres) and to examine their role in either upholding or challenging the personal, political, and religious values that these stories explored. The broad range of texts that are presented in this thesis will demonstrate how these faerie conventions took shape, and how they have been adapted and subverted from the Middle Ages to the early modern period.

Acknowledgements

This thesis was made possible through the help and support of many people. I would like to thank the University of Bristol for their contribution to the funding of this thesis. I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Cathy Hume and Dr Laurence Publicover, for their excellent guidance through each stage of the process. I would also like to thank Dr Tamsin Badcoe and Professor Helen Fulton for their contributions and advice. The sections in chapter five of this thesis on the anonymous *Tragical History, Admirable Achievements and Various Events of Guy Earl of Warwick* and Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* have appeared, in a slightly altered form, as an article in *The Ben Jonson Journal*, and I would like to thank the anonymous readers for their comments, and Professor Matthew Steggle for his advice prior to submission. I would like to thank my colleagues and fellow researchers, who have helped me to shape and articulate my ideas. And I would like to acknowledge Dr Corey Olson, whom I have never met, but whose recordings of the 'Faerie and Fantasy' course held at Washington College in 2011 gave me the inspiration to pursue this topic. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Martin and Carole, my sister Helen, and my partner Amanda; I could not have done this without their encouragement and support.

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: Stephen Bull DATE: 24 May 2020

Contents

Introduction:

The Faerie Sign

> The Feywild, also called the Plane of Faerie, is a land of soft lights and wonder, a place of music and death. It is a realm of everlasting twilight, with glittering faerie lights bobbing in the gentle breeze and fat fireflies buzzing through groves and fields. The sky is alight with the faded colors of an ever-setting sun, which never truly sets […]. The Feywild exists in parallel to the Material Plane, an alternate dimension that occupies the same cosmological space. The landscape of the Feywild mirrors the natural world but turns its features into spectacular forms […]. The Feywild is inhabited by sylvan creatures, such as elves, dryads, satyrs, pixies, and sprites, as well as centaurs and magical creatures such as blink dogs, faerie dragons, treants, and unicorns. The darker regions of the plane are home to such malevolent creatures as hags, blights, goblins, ogres, and giants.
>
> (*The Dungeon Master's Guide*, 2014) [1]

As peculiar as it may seem to begin a thesis about faeries in medieval and early modern romance with an example of 'faerie' taken from the 2014 edition of the *Dungeon Master's*

[1] Scot Fitzgerald Gray et al. (eds), *Dungeon Master's Guide* (Renton: Wizards of the Coast, 2014), p. 49.

Guide (a rulebook intended for players of the fantasy roleplaying game Dungeons & Dragons), the above example helps to identify exactly what this thesis means by the term 'faerie' and how it is situated within the context of romance. I have chosen to use 'faerie' rather than 'fairy' throughout this thesis when referring to the faeries found in medieval and early modern sources. My decision to adopt this Spenserian medievalism is part of an attempt to distinguish the faeries of these earlier periods from the whimsical, pixie-like fairies that often dominate twentieth and twenty-first century culture. Primarily, my aim is to draw attention to the unique function that faeries played in the romance literatures of the medieval and early modern periods. However, before further exploring the role of faeries in romance, it is worth briefly considering the way that we approach the concept of fairies in popular culture today in order to develop a basis for this comparison.

For the most part, fairies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are associated with the diminutive, insect-winged creatures that appear in sentimental children's literature. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, for example, describes them as,

> One of a class of supernatural beings having human form, to whom are traditionally attributed magical powers and who are thought to interfere in human affairs (with either good or evil intent). In later use usually: *spec.* such a being having the form of a tiny, delicate, and beautiful girl or young woman, usually with insect-like wings.[2]

[2] OED *fairy n* 3a.

This conception of fairy owes much of its success to the likes of Andrew Lang and J. M. Barrie who, at the turn of the twentieth century, helped to strengthen an existing Victorian association between fairies (particularly winged fairies) and children's literature through the popularity of their work: namely, Lang's coloured fairy book series (1889-1910) and Barrie's stage play *Peter Pan* (1904, published as a novel in 1911). The widespread appeal of these (and similar) works has meant that, to this day, fairies are frequently dismissed or looked down upon: deemed beyond the realms of adult literature and serious academic thought.[3] Barrie's Tinker Bell, in particular, has much to answer for in this regard and has had such a significant impact on how all future generations have interpreted fairies that it is near-impossible to break out from beneath her shadow (small and pixie-like though that shadow may be). One exception to this is in fantasy literature, where authors have, to a certain degree, reclaimed fairies for an adult audience, but even fantasy has a reputation as popular (genre) fiction and is often looked down upon as a form of literary expression.

As the opening quotation demonstrates, then, fairy land in the twenty-first century is frequently conceived of in terms of its whimsical nature – 'a land of soft lights and wonder', filled with 'glittering faerie lights', 'fat fireflies', and 'an ever-setting sun' – even when it is removed from the context of children's fairy stories. However, the image of fairy that appears in modern fantasy is also fraught with contradictions and ambiguities. The 'Feywild' described above is a land of 'music and death' that can be monstrous and haunting even whilst seeming beautiful and sublime. Furthermore, the diverse number of creatures that inhabit this fairy realm draw attention to the difficulty of determining exactly what constitutes a fairy. Thus,

[3] For J. R. R. Tolkien, in his famous essay 'On Fairy-Stories', a belief that children are somehow more susceptible to fairy tales is 'an accident of our domestic history', but one that has persisted, nonetheless. *Tales from the Perilous Realm* (London: HarperCollins, 2008), pp. 347-9.

whilst satyrs, pixies, unicorns, goblins, and giants all possess their own unique taxonomy within the world of Dungeons & Dragons, they are also defined in this specific context by their cohabitation of an otherworldly landscape that is distinct from our own 'Material Plane': they are all denizens of fairy land.

Whilst medieval approaches to 'faeries' differ significantly from our own modern conception of 'fairy' in many ways, the inherent ambiguity and uncertainty of the Feywild in the above example correspond to the way that faeries are depicted in romance during the medieval and early modern periods. Most notably, faerie land in romance is often identified as a space that borders our own mortal realm whilst also being temporally and geographically distinct from it. The landscapes of medieval faerie realms are likewise frequently conceived of in terms that express either their superlative beauty or ugliness. And the close relationship between beauty and death mentioned in the above example corresponds to some of the earliest recorded evidence of Celtic otherworldly spaces and pre-Christian realms of the dead, landscapes that helped to inform medieval notions about the nature of faerie land.

The similarities between modern fantasy and medieval romance are not entirely surprising considering that two of the progenitors of the fantasy genre – J. R. R. Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings*, and C. S. Lewis, author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*[4] – were also two of the leading medieval literary scholars of their generation. However, the faeries of the medieval and early modern periods are also distinguished from their modern equivalents by a level of ambiguity concerning their ontology that far exceeds anything that we find in more recent centuries. In many sources dating from the medieval period in particular we find

[4] George MacDonald's *Phantastes* (1858), an early example of the fantasy genre and an influence on the writings of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, likewise features conventions, characters, and otherworldly settings that relate to Arthurian romance. See George MacDonald, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, ed. by U. C. Knoepflmacher (London: Penguin, 1999).

a fascination with, or antagonism toward, faeries or faerie-like beings (or a mixture of both, as is the case in Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium*) that derives in large part from the difficulty that authors experienced in explaining their existence or meaning. Faeries represented something of an anomaly in relation to the divine order of creation: entities that did not sit easily within the established natural hierarchies. Indeed, accounts of faeries, elves, or similar faerie-like beings vary significantly throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period, from explanations that link them to the spread of mental or physical sickness, to accounts that attempt to ascribe a religious moral meaning to their appearance, to explanations that associate them with the heretical beliefs of the past, to treatises that identify them as demonic manifestations or illusions.[5]

The word 'faerie' ('fairy/fairi') comes from the French 'fae'/'fée' – itself derived from the Latin 'fata' (the Fates) – which first began to appear in texts dating from the first half of the twelfth century.[6] Geffrei Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis* (c.1130s), for example, describes Ælfthryth the daughter of Orgar as so beautiful that she must surely be a faerie rather than someone 'born of woman' ('k'il quidat bien ke ço fust *fee*, / k'ele ne fust de femme ne', 3657-62).[7] The term 'faerie' first appears in Middle English in three romances – *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Degaré*,

[5] See (respectively), Alaric Hall's account of the term 'elf-shot' in *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), pp. 108-18; Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, ed. and trans. by M. R. James, rev. by C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), pp. 348-9; Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, intro. by Rev. Montague Summers (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), VII.15; and King James VI and I, *Daemonologie* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), p. 75.

[6] OED *fairy n* 3a; *fay n*^{2}. In addition to this, there were many terms taken from the Latin lexicon and used interchangeably to refer to ambiguous supernatural creatures in various different texts throughout the Middle Ages. These included 'faun', 'satyr', 'nimpha' and 'lamia': of these, 'nimpha' was the most common. The Latin-derived 'incubus' was also commonly used to denote spirits or demons, generally evil in nature, with specifically sexual motivations. See James Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 4.

[7] Translated in full, the passage reads as follows: 'Æthelwald spent a great deal of time looking at her [Ælfthryth] – in fact the whole of one day. He stared at her for so long – her face and her complexion, her body and her hands – in the full bloom of her beauty that he convinced himself that she must have been a fairy and not someone born of woman'. Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Englais / History of the English*, ed. and trans. by Ian Short (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

and *The Romance of Reinbrun* – all found in the early-fourteenth-century Auchinleck manuscript.[8] The latter two examples, which both refer to a faerie knight, are adjectival rather than specifying a singular noun, and this raises an important question about word class. As Noel Williams has argued, many instances of the term faerie appearing in Old French and Early Middle English 'suggest that the notion of *fairy* in its earliest uses is not primarily to denote creatures, but a quality of phenomena or events which may or may not be associated with creatures'.[9] Indeed, examples of 'faerie' appearing in written records prior to the year 1400 suggest that the term had only a limited connection to any kind of ontologically distinct being.[10] For Williams, the etymology of faerie might best be identified through its connection to a more general (although admittedly vague) concept of 'fatedness' as 'a quality in the world which can control and direct the actions of humanity'.[11] This definition allows for a great deal of ambiguity in terms of the relationship between the name and the referent, and this ambiguity became a defining feature of the way that faeries were conceived of for centuries after.

In Old and Early Middle English, faeries were referred to using the Germanic term 'aelf' ('elf/ylf').[12] By the fourteenth century, the terms 'faerie' and 'elf' had become fairly interchangeable within the English language. Chaucer, for example, appears to draw no distinction between them, as demonstrated by these lines taken from *The Wife of Bath's Tale*:

[8] Noel Williams, 'The Semantics of the Word Fairy', in *The Good People*, ed. by Peter Narváez (New York: Garland, 1991), 457-78, p. 463. For *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Degaré*, see *The Middle English Breton Lays*, ed. by Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 10. For *The Romance of Reinbrun*, see NLS Adv MS 19.2.1, <https://auchinleck.nls.uk/mss/reinbrun.html>, accessed 02.09.2019. Mention of faeries can be found on line 100 of *Degaré* and on line 881 of *Reinbrun*.

[9] Noel Williams, p. 464.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid, p. 465.

[12] OED *elf n*1.

'This maketh that ther ben no fayeryes. / For there as wont to walken was an elf / Ther walketh now the lymytour hymself' (III, 872-4).[13] Even our earliest conceptual understanding of elves establishes a connection to the faeries of romance through their ambiguous ontology and their position on a spectrum between humans and monsters. Alaric Hall suggests that the regular appearance of *ælf*/*álfr* in Old English and Old Norse as a prefix in dithematic names identifies them as more amenable to humans than monsters and other creatures considered to be hostile to humankind.[14] However, Hall argues that through the gradual influence of Christianity elves became increasingly aligned with monsters. One example of this can be found in a royal prayer book dating from the last quarter of the eighth century. Here, the term elf appears in a Latinised form as part of a ritual intended to expel demons from the body: 'adiuro te satanae diabulus *aelfae* · per d*eu*m uiuum ac uerum · et per trementem diem iudicci ut refugiatur ab homine illo…' ['I conjure you, devil of Satan, of (an/the) *ælf*, through the living and true God and through the quaking day of judgement, that he is put to flight from that person…'].[15] Likewise, in *Beowulf* we see elves mentioned within a Christian context as part of a grouping of monstrous creatures born from Cain's curse:

> eotenas ond *ylfe* ond orcnēas,
> swylce gīgantas, þā wiđ Gode wunnon[.]
>
> (112-3) [16]

[13] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). Hereafter cited in text.

[14] Hall, p. 55-61.

[15] Cited in Hall, p. 72.

[16] *Beowulf*, ed. by George Jack (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). Heaney translates this as 'ogres and elves and evil phantoms / and the giants too who strove with God'. *Beowulf*, trans. by Seamus Heaney (London: Faber and Faber, 1999).

And in Anglo-Saxon medical texts such as *Wið Færstice*, elf arrows are identified as the cause of sudden pain in humans: a diagnosis that was referred to as 'elf-shot'.[17]

Faeries too were often considered to be dangerous to humankind. Indeed, this identification of elves and faeries as potentially harmful beings continues right the way through the Middle Ages and into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In religious texts dating from both the medieval and early modern periods, for example, faeries are associated both with fallen angels and with demonic illusion, suggesting an alignment closer to evil than to good.[18] However, they were also subject to contrasting interpretations that cast them in a number of different roles depending on the genre of the work in question. Church sermons did not approach the topic of faeries in the same way that romance texts or printed pamphlets did. In addition to this, faeries varied significantly depending on the social and cultural influences impacting on the author's preconception of what a faerie was: influences that might be regional, gender specific, or based on class and education. This is evidenced most clearly by the wide range of different Latin and vernacular terms used to identify faeries across the medieval and early modern periods (including *fée*, *elf*, *nymph*, *lamia*, *incubus*, *dusii*, *imp*, *puck*, *hobgoblin*, and *Robin Goodfellow*, to name just a few of the most commonly cited examples). Faeries could just as easily be associated with witchcraft and demonology, with domestic chores and harmless pranks, or with the appearance and social customs of

[17] Hall, pp. 108-18.

[18] Richard Firth Green, *Elf Queens and Holy Friars* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 23-4.

the aristocracy.[19] Their versatility as a literary sign is defined by the apparent ease with which they are able to slip between these different roles.

Within the specific context of romance literature, the uncertainty surrounding faerie ontology became a defining feature of their appearance and function. Studies of faerie otherworlds by Corrine Saunders and Jeff Rider have drawn attention to the role that faerie land plays in romance as a mirror image of the Arthurian court.[20] However, whilst romance faeries do frequently take on the appearance and customs of medieval courtly society, they are also something distinctly other, existing on the fringes of the known world and thus unbeholden to either human or divine law. The absence of social or moral restrictions made faeries dangerous characters to be around, and so their incorporation into romance served to cultivate a sense of uncertainty amongst its audiences.[21] Through the use of themes and motifs associated with faeries and the otherworld, the authors of these texts invited audiences to question the nature of these ambiguous creatures and to examine their role in either upholding or challenging the personal, political, and religious values that these stories explored.

The uncertainty surrounding faerie ontology is the primary focus of this thesis. However, this is not the first critical study to recognise the symbolic importance of ambiguity in faeries. James Wade, for example, has argued that 'faeries constitute the ambiguous

[19] For an account of the pervasiveness of faerie belief (or at least a widespread awareness of faeries) during the Middle Ages, see Green, pp. 11-41.

[20] Corrine Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 179-206; Jeff Rider, 'The other worlds of romance', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. by Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 115-31.

[21] As Helen Cooper suggests, 'It is the fairies' difference from ordinary humanity, or even heroic humanity — their freedom from the pains and limitations of mortality; their ability to break the rules of nature and time and physical space; their capacity to bestow unstinted wealth; their independence of moral conventions; their sheer unpredictability — that gives them their narrative interest'. *The English Romance in Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 173.

supernatural in romance' to such an extent that it serves to define their appearance from the earliest French lays to the printed romances of the late sixteenth century.[22] In *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, Wade argues that authorial intention plays a significant part in shaping faerie conventions to suit varying artistic and didactic purposes. Whilst this argument forms the basis for my understanding of the adaptability of faeries in romance, the aim of this thesis is also to recognise a degree of continuity in the way that faeries are incorporated into romance literature that stretches beyond the examples that critics have previously identified.

Of course, if faeries in romance are frequently depicted as ontologically ambiguous entities, we must then solve the problem of identifying which figures we can label as faeries and which we cannot. Many more characters appear to function as faeries than those that are explicitly named as such, and attempting to identify these enigmatic figures often generates as many problems as it solves: a point that can be illustrated through the example of the late fourteenth-century romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Debates concerning the exact ontology of the Green Knight and his relationship to faerie land have been broadly inconclusive. For John Burrow, *Sir Gawain* is a poem that keeps 'one foot firmly, though not too obtrusively, planted in the old world of "faery"'.[23] Thus, whilst there is some indication that the Green Knight may be a faerie character – the *Gawain*-poet describes him at one point as 'an alvisch [elvish] man' (681), although this may be in reference to his supernatural/magical abilities rather than his species – his otherworldly characteristics are never fully explained.[24] He is as tall as an 'etayn' [giant] (140) and different critics have

[22] Wade, p. 1.

[23] J. A. Burrow, *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 169.

[24] *The Works of the Gawain Poet*, ed. by Ad Putter and Myra Stokes (London: Penguin, 2014). All citations from the works of the *Gawain*-poet are taken from this edition and hereafter cited in text. Translations (when given) are my own, although with a significant debt to the footnotes provided in this edition.

attempted to identify him as 'a vegetation god, an archetypal Death figure, the Devil in disguise, or an allegorical representation of the Word of God or Christ', but for all that, his exact ontology and the source of his power remain unclear.[25] Furthermore, the revelation of Morgan le Fay's involvement at the end of the poem sheds serious doubt on whether the Green Knight's abilities are even his own, or whether he is under some form of curse or enchantment (2457-62).

For my own part, I believe that the Green Knight does function as a faerie character. However, classifying him as such requires a broader understanding of the symbolic properties of faeries in romance. In this respect, I am following on from Helen Cooper's example by identifying various conventions that are generally used in romance to signify the presence of faeries. For Cooper, recurring themes and motifs (what she terms 'memes') function as consistent images or rules that can be relied on to convey meaning or to uphold the conventions of a particular mode or genre. The meme's significance mutates gradually over time as authors adapt or subvert a particular image to fit different agendas or to challenge audience expectations. However, despite this continual process of adaptation, Cooper argues for a significant continuity in the way that recurring conventions are used right across the five-hundred-year period in which romance was the dominant fictional mode of Western Europe.[26]

Building on Cooper's argument, then, I have identified a number of conventions to be used throughout this thesis as a means of recognising faeries or faerie-like characters. These

[25] Lawrence Besserman, 'The Idea of the Green Knight', *English Literary History*, Vol. 53, 2 (1986), 219-39, p. 220. Another popular connection that critics have made is to the Green Man or Wild Man figures of medieval art and folklore, although this connection has been downplayed in works such as R. M. Bernheimer's, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952); and Derek Brewer's, 'The Colour Green', in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. by Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 181-90.

[26] Cooper, p. 3.

conventions include a connection to wilderness settings such as forests, streams, caves, and islands (particularly the liminal spaces on the borders of these locations); an emphasis on the hero's isolation as a precursor to an encounter; the distortion of time within faerie land; a focus on excess, luxury, and the sovereign power of the faerie character; a predilection for gift giving or moral testing on the part of the faerie; and a juxtaposition between beauty and monstrousness in the appearance of faerie land and its inhabitants. Whilst the ambiguous nature of romance faeries often makes it difficult to determine their exact ontology, the inclusion of at least some of these motifs builds certain expectations for the reader who is able to draw intertextually on a wide range of examples as part of the process of engaging with the intra-textual world. The continued process of adaptation and renegotiation of these motifs by romance authors engendered a degree of familiarity for the reader, or alternatively caused surprise if unexpected variations of this pattern occurred.[27]

By identifying faerie encounters in romance as a complex of motifs that are subject to continual interpretation and renegotiation, this thesis also takes its cue from Frederic Jameson's influential work on romance and genre, in which he identifies an interplay between literary form and the social or cultural context of a work. Jameson argues that historical and ideological contexts are effectively inseparable from the embedded codes and conventions of a particular mode or genre. As a result, romance (like many genres) is able to hark back to an existing literary and cultural tradition whilst also adapting to new historical and ideological approaches.[28] In much the same way, romance authors who engage with faeries do so by

[27] Mary Ellen Lamb and Valerie Wayne make a similar argument to this in their introduction to *Staging Early Modern Romance*. Building on Cooper's model, Lamb and Wayne draw attention to the continuing applicability of many romance 'memes', even in the context of the early modern stage. Mary Ellen Lamb and Valerie Wayne (eds.), *Staging Early Modern Romance* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 4

[28] Frederic Jameson, 'Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre', *New Literary History*, Vol. 7 (1975), pp. 142-3.

recognising certain motifs as part of an ongoing tradition that is both referential – relying on an intertextual awareness of what it means to encounter a faerie – and highly adaptable. They function, as Matthew Woodcock has suggested, 'as a sign with a negotiated referent'.[29] With this in mind, the collection of motifs that I will use to identify the presence of faeries in romance are referred to throughout this thesis as the *faerie sign*. By exploring different iterations of the faerie sign across selected medieval and early modern texts, my aim is to analyse the way that individual romance authors engage with its conventions to propagate a particular meaning or agenda.

The chief focus of this thesis, then, is romance literature: specifically, works written in French and English that form part of a tradition commonly referred to as Arthurian or courtly romance. By exploring the recurring presence of the faerie sign in Arthurian romances dating from the twelfth century to the sixteenth century, this thesis aims to contribute to scholarship of the past couple of decades that has attempted to enhance our appreciation of continuities running between the medieval and early modern periods. The purpose of this study is not to consider every possible interpretation of faeries in romance, but to focus primarily on the role that faeries play as part of the hero's development toward a more ennobled or enlightened state. Of course, in more general terms, this process of self-discovery is a well-observed convention of romance quest narratives. As Erich Auerbach observed, one of the ways in which romance can be distinguished from earlier epic literature and *chanson de geste* is by the personally motivated exploits of its protagonists.[30] The focal point of meaning within these romances is the questing knight's pursuit of certain ideals (i.e. courtly love, prowess, or spiritual enlightenment), identifying self-fulfilment as the knight's primary goal. However,

[29] Matthew Woodcock, *Fairy in The Faerie Queene* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004), p. 28.

[30] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 133-4.

what has been less frequently commented upon is the significant role that faeries or faerie-like characters often play in helping to shape these ideals. The ambiguity surrounding these otherworldly figures forms part of an intentional narrative strategy in which the author is purposefully destabilising both the protagonist's and the audience's expectations concerning the outcome of the story. Indeed, whilst romance is characterised by its tendency to fall back on happy endings that reaffirm the *status quo*, encounters with the ambiguous world of faerie frequently represent some of the most unsettling moments of narrative tension within the conventional romance arc.[31] In these moments, protagonists are often faced with moral or social dilemmas involving juxtaposing chivalric ideals. Competing values of knighthood are put to the test in otherworldly spaces that are defined by their uncertain position within the romance world. As a result, the author's use of motifs related to the faerie sign cultivates a sense of uncertainty which corresponds to the difficult choices that knightly protagonists must often make. In addition to this, the faerie sign allows the author to explore the limitations of an idealised medieval court by drawing attention to the conflicting nature of many of its values.[32] It is by examining faeries in the context of their relationship to the knights who encounter them that we can understand the important role that faeries played as a device used for exploring social, political, and religious ideals.

However, this thesis also stands apart from previous studies on the function of faeries in romance through its engagement with texts that are not generally considered alongside more conventional examples of medieval and early modern faerie literature. I have, for the

[31] Tolkien wrote that the realm of faerie represented a 'perilous land' filled with 'pitfalls for the unwary and dungeons for the over-bold' ('On Fairy-Stories', p. 351).

[32] Critics such as Rosemond Tuve, Erich Auerback, and Gillian Beer have all commented on romance as representing both a realistic and an idealised image of medieval courtly society. See Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 342; Auerbach, p. 133; Gillian Beer, *The Romance* (London: Methuen, 1970), pp. 23-4.

most part, avoided detailed discussion of works such as *Sir Orfeo*, *Huon de Bordeaux*, *Ogier le Danois*, Jean d'Arras' *Melusine*, and Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, in part because such works have been discussed expertly elsewhere, but also because my primary focus is on those examples where it is particularly difficult to determine the presence of faeries.[33]

In each of the examples that I will explore in later chapters, the exact nature of certain otherworldly characters and settings are left intentionally ambiguous by authors in order to engage their audiences in a process of interpretation. For example, in the works of Chrétien de Troyes (the focus of chapter two of this thesis) faerie-like characters such as Mabonagrain in *Erec et Enide* or the Fisher King in *Le Conte du Graal* often become rationalised as part of Chrétien's process of exploring their relationship to certain courtly ideals. Throughout Chrétien's work, places and people frequently exhibit both natural and supernatural characteristics, and it is through this uncertainty that Chrétien is able to explore, and often challenge, the codes and conventions of twelfth-century courtly life. By contrast, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (one of three texts covered in chapter three) the Green Knight himself exhibits some quite striking and unavoidable supernatural characteristics. However, as has been demonstrated above, his exact ontology remains unclear throughout the poem, and this has a marked effect on the way that we as an audience must strive to interpret the implications of his challenge to Gawain and to Arthur's court. Even in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (the focus of chapter four), it is unclear how much we can read into the faerie nature

[33] For studies on faeries in the above mentioned texts, see Dorena Allen, 'Orpheus and Orpheo', *Medium Ævum*, Vol. 33, 2 (1964), pp. 102-11; Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les Fées au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Champion, 1984) and *Le Monde de Fées dans l'Occident medieval* (Paris: Hachette, 2003); A. C. Spearing, 'Sir Orfeo: Madness and Gender', in *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, ed. by Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert (London: Routledge, 2013), 258-72; and the works by Helen Cooper (*The English Romance in Time*) and James Wade (*Fairies in Medieval Romance*) already mentioned above.

of the inhabitants of Gloriana's faerie realm, their being little to distinguish such characters from the questing Britons who also appear throughout the poem.

By using the conventions outlined above to identify the presence of faeries (or at least the suggestion of a faerie encounter) within each of these texts, this thesis will emphasise just how pervasive the faerie sign is within romance as a set of themes and motifs that are intentionally employed by authors to engage audiences in a process of interpretation. However, many of the conventions that I outline in this thesis also exist in literatures that predate the advent of romance in the twelfth century, and their presence can also be identified in medieval and early modern texts that fall outside of what we would traditionally classify as romance. Beyond the examples taken from romance, then, this thesis engages with a range of texts that include pre-romance Celtic literatures such as *Immram Brain* and *Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed*, the fourteenth-century religious dream vision *Pearl*, and two early modern stage plays: Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* and Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Whilst this is certainly a broad chronological and generic range of works to consider for one thesis, these examples all exhibit themes and motifs that can be identified either as precursors to the faerie sign in romance or as adaptations of it. The presence of faeries or faerie-like beings within these texts thus raises some interesting questions about the way that authors are engaging with the faerie sign outside of the conventional structure of the individual heroic quest narrative. Through an examination of these works, we can begin to understand how different authors' awareness of the faerie sign helped to shape its use across a wide range of examples.

The first chapter of this thesis will explore two early examples of quest narratives involving ambiguous otherworlds and encounters with strange faerie-like beings: the Irish

voyage narrative *Immram Brain* and the Welsh legend of *Pwyll Pendefig Dyved* (otherwise known as the first branch of the *Mabinogi*). Both examples derive from traditions of Celtic mythology and oral storytelling that predate the earliest romances of Chrétien de Troyes. This chapter will examine these texts in relation to their engagement with the otherworlds of Celtic tradition, drawing attention to the way that ambiguous supernatural landscapes and characters were used in the literatures of Britain and Ireland prior to the advent of romance in the twelfth century. Here, we see early evidence of the faerie sign in the familiar motifs that appear throughout each of these stories. The inhabitants of the Land of Women in *Brain* and the figures of Arawn and Rhiannon in *Pwyll* all exhibit traits such as incomparable beauty or material splendour, an association with liminal settings, and an ability to distort natural laws. They also function as idealised and otherworldly mirror images of the story's 'central aristocratic society'.[34] However, this chapter will demonstrate that some aspects of the faerie sign are absent from these earlier sources. This is particularly true in terms of the connection that faeries have to knightly self-discovery in the works of romance authors. Here, faeries do not operate as arbiters of individual human action in quite the same way. An examination of these differences thus helps to identify the important role that historical and ideological contexts play in shaping the function of the faerie sign.

Chapter two explores Chrétien de Troyes' Arthurian romances and his engagement with supernatural motifs derived primarily from Breton oral tradition. Whilst Chrétien seldom refers to faeries by name, his handling of the faerie sign has a significant impact on the way that faeries feature in romance from the twelfth century onward. Chrétien composed his

[34] The term 'central aristocratic society' is taken from Jeff Rider's 'The other worlds of romance', in which he identifies the established world of the court (frequently the court of King Arthur) as the start and end point of the hero's quest with which the wild and otherworldly landscapes of romance are contrasted (p. 115).

romances during a period of increased interaction between religious clerics and the secular elite in the courts of Northern Europe, and his stories reflect an intermingling of values related to both courtly ethics and religious morality. For the male aristocracy, this was an era associated with crusade and with the fulfilment of Christian duty on the battlefields of the Levant and southern Spain. At the same time, however, a rising interest in courtly love poetry originating from the troubadours of Southern France was reshaping literary tastes by emphasising individual aspiration and the acquisition of romantic love as the greatest ideal of courtly nobility. This chapter will argue that Chrétien's romances build on contemporary notions of chivalry as the highest calling available to young men of the court. In doing so, they engage with the various competing and often contradictory values that were commonly associated with the chivalric ideal. In Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, and *Le Chevalier au Lion*, conflicting values of courtly love and martial prowess are put to the test as part of the hero's progression toward self-discovery. However, in *Le Conte du Graal*, Chrétien shifts focus to the difficulty of assimilating material knightly pursuits with the search for spiritual piety. In each of these examples, I will demonstrate that the faerie sign is used to highlight conflicting ideals of chivalry by placing the protagonist in situations that complicate their (and our) ability to identify the 'right' course of action. Thus, whilst faeries and the supernatural are far less prominent features in Chrétien's writing than in the lays of his contemporary Marie de France, or even in many of the continuations of his work in later centuries, the connection that he draws between faerie motifs and the process of knightly self-discovery within romance sets the standard for future uses of the faerie sign.

The third chapter builds on arguments raised in chapter two by considering a small group of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts – *Pearl*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and *Sir Gowther* – that also engage in a conflict between material desires and spiritual piety.

The question that I will be addressing in this chapter is whether faeries in romance could be used to contribute meaningfully to conversations about faith and religious moral virtue, or, as is the case in *Pearl*, whether evidence of the faerie sign can be seen in more conventional religious works. With a few exceptions, critical studies interested in medieval conceptions of faerie have engaged with them on purely secular terms, thanks in part to the predominantly hostile (or at least dismissive) stance on faerie belief that was adopted by Church authorities and scholastic theologians right across the Middle Ages. However, in the context of romance, the uncertain position that faeries inhabit on a boundary between good and evil places them in a unique position to question the moral integrity of the knightly protagonists who enter their realm. As a result, this chapter aims to break down preconceived notions of romance faeries as representing an entirely secular form of literary expression. Indeed, as I will demonstrate, the faerie sign served as a useful literary device when attempting to assimilate doctrinal beliefs with the conventions of the aristocratic court. Once again, they function as a way of exploring the complex and often contradictory values acting upon the chivalric ideal.

In chapter four, this thesis moves on to an examination of the faerie sign in early modern romance by considering the example of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. The significant change that occurs during this period is the broader range of literary contexts in which faeries appear. Whilst faeries were still associated with the conventions of romance literature in many cases, they were also increasingly discussed in relation to domestic and rural folkloric belief; they appeared in Protestant Reformist treatises that endeavoured to associate them with false Catholic magical practices and with witchcraft; and the term faerie frequently appears in translations of Classical works as a synonym for nymph and similar antiquarian nature spirits. This range of different interpretations stretches far beyond their function in romance as arbiters of human action and mirror images of the aristocratic court.

This chapter will examine the ways that Spenser both subverts and upholds conventions associated with the faerie sign in his greatest poetic work. On the one hand, his engagement with different interpretations of faeries and faerie land allows him to construct an allegory that glorifies the image of his sovereign through the figure of the faerie queen, whilst also distinguishing Elizabeth from potentially harmful or problematic interpretations of faerie. However, Spenser also continues the tradition explored in earlier chapters in which journeys into faerie land are associated with self-discovery and the amalgamation of different courtly virtues. In the context of Spenser's allegory, it is the audience themselves who are asked to go on a quest, accompanying Arthur into Gloriana's faerie realm in order to explore Spenser's idealised image of gentlemanly virtue. Whilst the importance of the reader's journey through the different books of *The Faerie Queene* has been recognised by critics before, the significant role that Spenser's faeries play in shaping this journey has been less well documented. As I will argue, then, the uncertainty that is associated with the faerie sign in romance intentionally complicates the reader's ability to interpret Spenser's gentlemanly virtues by obscuring the origin and nature of many of the characters that inhabit his faerie land. As a result, faeries effectively become part of the process by which Spenser encourages his readers to identify the 'correct' path for themselves.

I conclude this thesis with a chapter examining three early modern stage plays that feature interactions between humans and faeries: the anonymous *Tragical History, Admirable Achievements and Various Events of Guy Earl of Warwick*, Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*, and William Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Except for *Guy Earl of Warwick*, the plays covered in this chapter extend my argument concerning the function of the faerie sign to examples outside of the generic conventions of romance covered elsewhere in this thesis. Here I will argue that, in the case of both *The Alchemist* and *Merry Wives*, the faerie characters

are not 'real' in the sense that we have come to expect from previous romance sources (i.e. existing as ambiguous but ontologically distinct entities within the context of the narrative). Rather, they represent instances of human cozenage or deception enacted on the unwary: faeries that have no literal existence outside of the bounds of superstitious belief and hearsay. As a result, and despite the continuing popularity of romance across the sixteenth and early seventeenth century (as attested by works such as Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*), critics interested in early modern drama have tended to focus exclusively on the influence of rural and domestic folkloric belief on the appearance and function of stage faeries. By contrast, the aim of this chapter is to consider the extent to which these plays still engage with aspects of the faerie sign. In particular, I will explore the way that faeries continue to function as arbiters of human action that are used to comment on the ethical or moral limitations of certain characters. In so doing, this chapter will draw attention to the ongoing influence of the faerie sign and its associated motifs in early modern culture, building on recent scholarship that has focused on the influence of romance on early modern drama, and exploring the extent to which dramatists such as Jonson and Shakespeare were able to adapt the medieval faerie sign to suit new meanings and interpretations.

The important role that the final two chapters of this thesis play is to develop a clearer understanding of the continuities that exist between the medieval and early modern periods in relation to the faerie sign. Whilst Arthurian romance gradually fell out of fashion (at least amongst the cultural elite) during the seventeenth century, its influence and popularity were still felt throughout much of the early modern period. Likewise, the associated conventions of the faerie sign in romance continued to shape authors' and audiences' understanding of the appearance and function of faeries in literature. Whilst new approaches to faeries had begun to emerge, defined largely by their association with rural and domestic folkloric

tradition, works that included faerie characters still retained a connection to the faeries of romance who functioned as mirror images of medieval courtly society and challengers of certain chivalric ideals. Indeed, as this thesis will argue, the pattern that emerges in relation to the appearance and function of faeries in romance (and certain related genres) right across the medieval and early modern periods is a consistent one. From our earliest sources, faeries and faerie-like beings have shared certain conventions that help to identify their presence for both authors and audiences. However, more than this, the examples explored throughout this thesis draw attention to the very specific function that faeries perform for the questing knights who encountered them.

Chapter One:

The Faerie Sign Before Romance

> It was not long afterwards till they reached the Land of the Women. They saw the band of the woman in the harbour. The leader of the women said: "Come here on to the land, o Bran son of Febal. Your coming is welcome." Bran did not dare go ashore. The woman throws a ball of thread to Bran, directly over his face. Bran puts his hand on the ball. The ball clung to his palm. The thread of the ball was in the woman's hand. She pulled the coracle towards the harbour.
>
> (62) [1]

The appearance and function of otherworldly figures and landscapes in the Early Irish voyage narrative *Immram Brain* (*The Voyage of Bran*) share some clear parallels with the themes and motifs that are commonly associated with faeries in romance: themes that pertain to the beauty and opulence of the otherworldly realm and its inhabitants; the positioning of the otherworld in relation to liminal, natural landmarks; a narrative emphasis on journeying away from a centralised, courtly society; and ambiguity and uncertainty as markers of faerie ontology. In this respect, *Brain* exhibits early evidence for the kind of literary conventions concerned with the otherworldly that this thesis identifies as a component of the faerie sign. However, Bran's entry into the Land of Women in *Immram Brain* via a ball of thread is, in other

[1] *Immram Brain*, ed. and trans. by Séamus Mac Mathúna (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1985). Hereafter cited in text.

respects, unlike any faerie encounter that we come across in the romances of the High to Late Middle Ages. As a late-seventh- or early-eighth-century work of Irish literature, recorded roughly half a millennium before Chrétien de Troyes began writing his Arthurian romances in France, *Brain* possesses many stylistic, aesthetic, and rhetorical features that draw attention to the very different culture in which this story was composed. Not least amongst these differences is the strong connection that *Brain* has to an older oral tradition of Irish mythological stories, evidenced through the presence of the sea deity Manannán mac Lir, through references to Mag Mell (a paradisiacal realm of the dead comparable to the Classical Elysium), and through Bran's journey to the otherworldly Isle of Women. In addition to this, whilst the story follows an arc that bears some relation to the conventional quest narratives of romance, the focus in this instance is not centred on the exploits of one individual in quite the same way.

Alongside *Brain*, this chapter will examine the Welsh legend of *Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed* (*Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed*), a story that may date as far back as the eleventh century in written form, but that also shows evidence of a connection to older traditions of oral storytelling and Celtic mythology. The world of *Pwyll* and its associated tales, collectively referred to as the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* (itself part of a grouping of medieval Welsh tales published during the nineteenth century under the title *The Mabinogion*), is a magical one, filled with supernatural kings, necromantic cauldrons, women grown from plants, and disembodied monstrous hands that snatch new-born foals from their stables. However, the regular, almost quotidian appearance of marvels within these stories distinguishes magic in *Pwyll* from the more plot-driven uses of supernatural phenomena in the works of Chrétien de Troyes and later romance authors. As with *Brain*, *Pwyll* features certain themes and motifs that are later

found in romance, but there is also a distinct difference regarding the way that faeries or faerie-like characters are used within this story.

The aim of this chapter is to understand the ambiguous otherworlds of both *Brain* and *Pwyll* by identifying themes and motifs that link Celtic otherworldly traditions to romance. In so doing, this chapter identifies characters within these texts – the inhabitants of the Land of Women in *Brain*, and Arawn and Rhiannon in *Pwyll* – as early iterations of the faerie sign. Part of my argument will centre on linking the themes and motifs found in *Brain* and *Pwyll* to examples of faeries encounters within romance. This in itself is not a new way of reading such figures and events. As Corinne Saunders suggests, Celtic tales of the supernatural were a 'particularly formative' aspect of the otherworlds found in romance.[2] Within the wider scope of this thesis, though, the topics explored in this chapter help to establish the various components of the faerie sign, allowing us to identify faerie characters in later romance texts even when they are not explicitly named as such.

Although I am arguing for a continuity in the faerie sign itself, I will be keeping in mind the very different social and historical contexts in which these two pre-romance texts were written. By highlighting divergent aspects of the ambiguous supernatural otherworlds of *Brain* and *Pwyll*, we can begin to see that characters who are linked to faeries through their relation to the faerie sign often perform very specific functions within their individual narratives. Most notably, these early examples of the faerie sign are not tied to the exploits of individual knightly protagonists in quite the same way as we find in romance, nor are they as concerned with processes of self-discovery and the testing of moral and ethical virtues: aspects of the faerie sign that will be explored more thoroughly in later chapters. Identifying

[2] Corinne Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, p. 180.

the purpose of the faerie sign in these texts thus relies on a broader understanding of the context in which each text was written, and an awareness of the different meanings that can be cultivated through the author's engagement with this particular set of conventions. In both texts covered in this chapter, for example, otherworldly peoples and landscapes serve to highlight the tentative relationship that exists between Celtic magical traditions and the Christian societies in which these stories were recorded.

The phrase 'Celtic natural magic' was first introduced in Matthew Arnold's *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), in which Arnold attempted to outline the close relationship that ancient Celtic races had with the magical potency of nature. For Arnold, Celtic literature, more than the literatures of antiquity or of other medieval cultures, was imbued with 'the fairy-like loveliness' of nature, suggesting that Celtic authors had a particular affinity for recognising magic within the natural world.[3] The frequent and seemingly arbitrary appearance of magic in early Welsh and Irish literature thus resulted in a tendency amongst critics, from Arnold onwards, to associate all depictions of irrational magic with this Celtic tradition. Corinne Saunders, for example, writes that the 'dream-like and irrational' elements of French and English romance were ultimately derived from Celtic depictions of the supernatural.[4]

However, arguments that emphasise the irrationality of Celtic magic also often overlook the way that such marvels are used in early Welsh and Irish literature as a narrative device intended to cultivate a particular meaning. Helen Fulton, for example, argues that texts such as *Culhwch ac Olwen* and *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy* depict Arthur as a king with innate magical powers (or, at least, in command of magical followers) as a way of engaging with the

[3] Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1867), pp. 133-7.

[4] Saunders, pp. 180-1.

Welsh past and cultivating an image of strong, independent British leadership at a time when the political autonomy of Wales was being challenged by Norman and Plantagenet rule.[5] The wonders that appear in these stories are depicted as an empirical reality, a kind of 'magic naturalism' that helps to validate the power of British sovereignty (or, as is the case in *Breuddwyd Rhonabwy*, to satirise that power). Similarly, Mark Williams suggests that the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* represent an 'extraordinarily searching and reflective' approach to the supernatural that 'consists of more than the mere framing of inherited supernatural incidents within a graceful style'.[6] In particular, Williams argues that unorthodox depictions of magic in the *Mabinogi* are held in a state of tension with the possibility of social catastrophe in such a way that magic, whilst an integral part of the intra-textual world, is rarely represented in a positive light. As such, the author of the Four Branches presents the supernatural in a way that is intentionally provocative: challenging the reader to consider its use and meaning as part of a process of interpretation.

With this in mind, one of my intentions in identifying early evidence for the faerie sign in *Brain* and *Pwyll* is to demonstrate how these texts both compare to and differ from the examples that will be covered later in this thesis. Whilst figures such as Arawn, Rhiannon, and the inhabitants of the Land of Women can be recognised as faeries to some degree, their function within these early Welsh and Irish texts does not fully correspond to the way that faeries are used in romance as arbiters of individual human action. As such, this chapter recognises that texts such as these represent something of a transitional phase between Celtic oral and mythological traditions, and the supernatural and otherworldly characters and

[5] Helen Fulton, 'Magic and the Supernatural in Early Welsh Arthurian Narrative', in *Arthurian Literature XXX*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and David F. Johnson (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013), pp. 1-26.

[6] Mark Williams, 'Magic and Marvels', in *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, ed. by Geraint Evans and Helen Fulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 52-72, p. 68.

places that populate romance.[7] However, they also function in their own right as stories that engage with marvellous and supernatural elements in a way that is specific to the social and historical contexts in which they were written.

In order to situate these two works in relation to both Celtic otherworldly tradition and romance, then, this chapter begins with a discussion of existing criticism concerning the nature and function of medieval faeries. Across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, critics interested in faeries were broadly concerned with attempting to trace the origins of faerie belief. Whilst many of these critics' works fail to achieve their intended goal, due primarily to a lack of traceable evidence and the ultimately speculative conclusions that they reach, they do still form a basis for our understanding of the close connection that exists between faeries and Celtic otherworldly tradition. The main focus of this section, however, will be on those critics who, from the mid-twentieth century onwards, have explored the semantic function of faeries and their adaptability to different socio-historical contexts and authorial interpretations. Here, this chapter identifies one of the defining characteristics of faeries: the ambiguous position that they inhabit between human and 'other'. The arguments put forward in the following section thus establish a basis for how faeries will be identified in both *Brain* and *Pwyll*, and also in the texts that will be explored throughout this thesis.

[7] Stephen Knight suggests that it is surprising to find that more people have not referred to the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* when discussing Chrétien de Troyes' work. For Knight, the Four Branches have more in common with Chrétien's romances in terms of style and subject matter than Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (generally thought to be Chrétien's main source for his Arthurian material). Stephen Knight, 'Celticity and Christianity in Medieval Romance', in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England*, ed. by Rosalind Field, Phillipa Hardman and Michelle Sweeney (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010), 26-44, p.31.

Approaches to faerie

Critical treatises on faeries in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were broadly concerned with attempting to establish a point of origin for faerie belief within the pre-Christian cultures of Northern Europe. One popular approach, for example, attempted to explain widespread belief in faeries as derived from a residual cultural memory of an ancient aboriginal race of humans. The progenitor of this theory was Sir Walter Scott who, in 1830, wrote about a race of dwarfish gnomes called 'duergar' who were pushed out of Lapland and Finland by the conquering Scandinavians.[8] However, there were also many others who argued equally fervently in favour of various competing theories concerning the origins of faerie belief. Some, for example, suggested that faerie-lore had developed from ancient beliefs concerning the human spirit after death, whilst others argued that faerie-lore represented the remnants of a belief system centred around the worship of elemental spirits who inhabited trees, lakes, rocks, and other natural landmarks.[9] Indeed, the eagerness with which faerie scholarship in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries sought to explain faerie belief was matched only by an inability to come to any kind of an agreement on its origins. The speculative nature of these theories and the lack of evidence for ancient aboriginal cultures or early belief systems ultimately resulted in many scholars settling on a definition of faerie belief that relied on an uncertain amalgam of these different influences. As such, by around the mid-point of the twentieth century, scholarship on the origins of

[8] Sir Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 120-1.

[9] For a connection between faeries and dead ancestors, see W. Y. Evans Wentz's *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* (London: Froude, 1911); and Alexander H. Krappe's *The Science of Folk-Lore* (New York: The Dial Press, 1930). For the role that faeries play in agricultural growth and ritual, see Alfred Nutt's 'The Fairy Mythology of English Literature: Its Origin and Nature', *Folklore*, Vol. 8, 1 (1897), pp. 29-53.

faerie belief was in decline. The search for the ur-faerie had ultimately been deemed impossible.[10]

Within literary studies, attempts to identify a point of origin for the faeries that emerge in the romances of the Middle Ages have also drawn a connection to their potential antecedents in pre-Christian systems of belief. Lucy Allen Paton's *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance* (1903), for example, was the first to argue that romance faeries were derived from an original pagan source. For Paton, the outlandish and ambiguous characteristics of these faeries could be rationalised as evidence of an ancient Celtic mythological system, and the many ontological inconsistencies that are commonly associated with romance faeries could be attributed to the lack of understanding that medieval authors had of their original function as objects of belief.[11] Thus, whilst faeries continued to play a part in the popular beliefs and literatures of the Middle Ages, their relationship to pre-Christian forms of worship meant that they were incorporated with some difficulty into a cosmology based around Christian doctrine.

Certainly, the significant influence of Celtic and Breton oral tradition on the works of twelfth-century authors such as Marie de France and Chrétien de Troyes has been well-documented, most notably in the works of Roger Sherman Loomis, whose research into the

[10] This did not prevent Lewis Spence from claiming to have found a solution to the origins of faerie belief in 1946. Spence argued that faeries were the vestiges of an ancient, primitive belief system in which the spirits of dead ancestors were thought to inhabit lakes, rocks, trees, and other natural spaces before being reincarnated into the wombs of pregnant women: in effect, incorporating various different arguments concerning faerie belief into a single theory. For Spence, the spirit cults from which faerie belief derived predated classical gods, fauns, nymphs, Celtic nature spirits and many other supernatural beliefs besides. In this respect, he considered many of the otherworldly beings who are often thought of as precursors to faeries (i.e. Diana, Hades, Persephone, water nymphs, Odin, the Norns, or the Moirai) as divergent branches of a much more ancient belief system. Lewis Spence, *British Fairy Origins* (London: Watts, 1946).

[11] Lucy Allen Paton, *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance*, 2nd edn. (New York: Burt Franklin, 1960). See also J. A. MacCulloch, *Medieval Faith and Fable* (London: Harrap, 1932); and John Revell Reinhard, *The Survival of Geis in Medieval Romance* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1933).

Celtic origins of the supernatural in Arthurian literature still influences approaches to magic in romance to this day.[12] However, whilst there is evidence to suggest that the faeries of romance were derived in large part from Celtic and Breton tradition, one of the problems with attempting to trace their pre-Christian origins is that there is little evidence to suggest that early medieval writers thought of faeries as an extension of ancient belief systems. As Carl Watkins has argued, the continued existence of visual signifiers associated with the subject does not mean that its internal structure of beliefs survived too. [13] In effect, there is no reason to suppose that the function of faeries in romance resembles the way that ambiguous supernatural spirits were thought to operate in earlier centuries. Thus, whilst the faeries of romance may well have their origins in pre-Christian oral traditions and systems of belief, these faeries tell us more about the authors and audiences who engaged with them throughout the Middle Ages and into the early modern period.

Critical discussion of faeries in medieval literature from the latter half of the twentieth century to the present day has thus tended to focus on their semantic function within a particular socio-historical context, rather than attempting to trace a theoretical point of origin for faerie belief. The first study to take this approach was C. S. Lewis' *The Discarded Image* (1964), which positions faeries within a broader system of medieval supernatural belief and briefly considers how that relationship impacted on their function in romance literature. Lewis suggests, for example, that the imaginative value of faeries derived from their vagueness in a medieval system that attempted to categorise all things within a rigid hierarchical framework.[14] For Lewis, determining where faeries came from was less important

[12] See, in particular, *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927).

[13] C. S. Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 83.

[14] C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 122.

than understanding how they were perceived contemporaneously by the authors, audiences, believers, and critics who engaged with them on a social and cultural level. Accordingly, Lewis' argument moves away from an emphasis on the pre-Christian origins of faeries, focusing instead on their symbolic relevance within a wider system of medieval cultural belief.

More recently, Helen Cooper has drawn attention to the role that faeries specifically play in medieval romance, highlighting the intertextuality of certain faerie conventions and emphasising the way that repeated themes and motifs can generate meaning by upholding or subverting audience expectations. Romance authors, Cooper argues, are continually looking back to earlier texts in the process of constructing their own narratives and so their engagement with the recurring motifs of faerie form part of a dialogue with an existing literary tradition. However, 'whilst romance motifs remain superficially the same, sometimes even down to verbal detail, the usage and understanding of them changes over time, rather in the way that a word may change meaning'.[15] In this respect, any attempt to interpret the recurring motifs of romance is also dependent on an engagement with the broader culture of the period, with the specific circumstances that led to their composition, and with an acknowledgement of the shared understanding between author and reader that allows such motifs to convey meaning in the first place.[16]

James Wade, on the other hand, has drawn particular attention to *poiesis* and the 'world-constructing powers' of the author as integral to the way that faerie motifs are adapted and subverted within individual romances.[17] For Wade, the ambiguity of the romance faerie functions as a useful authorial device, a means of intentionally generating

[15] Cooper, *Romance in Time*, p. 4.

[16] Ibid, p. 3.

[17] Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, pp. 5-6.

uncertainty about the internal folklore of the narrative world. Wade cites examples such as the unnamed maiden in Marie de France's *Guigemar* (late twelfth century), the otherworldly knight of *Amadas et Idoine* (c.1200-20), the Green Knight of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (late fourteenth century), and Gray Steel in *Eger and Grime* (c.1450), all of whom fluctuate uncertainly between human and faerie traits. By making the ontology of these characters intentionally unclear, the author of a romance text causes the reader to fill in the gaps themselves, incorporating their own pre-existing models built from the conventions of an extensive literary tradition. Through this strategy, the author is able to elevate the narrative tension of these supernatural encounters, encouraging audience speculation through the inherent 'irresolvability' of the ambiguous character's ontology.[18]

In addition to this, Wade refers to the 'adoxic' nature of faeries and the lack of rational motivation for many of their actions in romance (at least at a diegetic level).[19] Faeries provide little explanation for their intrusion into the mortal realm, appearing without warning to dispense gifts or to set challenges in a manner that seems intended specifically to destabilise the equilibrium of the intra-textual world. The unfamiliarity of the otherworld and the unknowability of its inhabitants makes it an ideal space for testing the courage of the knightly characters who venture across its borders. However, whilst Wade sees faeries as acting without logical explanation at a diegetic level, his argument also draws attention to an extra-diegetic explanation for their purpose which sees them appearing throughout the romance tradition as arbiters of human action. In most cases, Wade argues, faeries appear for the specific purpose of testing or rewarding the behaviour of human characters.

[18] Ibid, pp. 21-6.

[19] See Wade's chapter 'Beyond Orthodoxy: Tests and Quests' in *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, pp. 72-107.

The literary function of faeries is thus closely related to the way that monsters are used in fictional medieval narratives (at least when they are antagonistic to the humans that they encounter). For David Williams, monsters in the Middle Ages serve as useful devices for engaging with philosophical and spiritual ideas. In a culture that endeavoured to classify and give order to all of creation, monsters were a symbolic expression of a Pseudo-Dionysian theology which argued that 'God transcends human knowledge utterly and can be known only by what He is not'.[20] In effect, monsters, as signs without a corresponding referent in the real world, represent the inadequacy of the human brain to comprehend the limitlessness of creation.[21] Creatures such as werewolves, giants, sciapods (single-footed humans), and blemmyae (men with heads in their chests) operate in opposition to religious, philosophical, and social orthodoxies, indicating an awareness of our own divided self and embodying that feeling within signs that are both anthropomorphic and beyond human comprehension.

However, faeries, as beings that mirror human appearance to the point of being almost indistinguishable from humans, build on our sense of dividedness in a different way. One useful way of contextualising this is by comparing the function of faeries in medieval literature to modern psychoanalytic theory: specifically, Lacanian theories pertaining to our understanding of the self. Lacan's 'Mirror Stage' describes an early stage in a child's

[20] Medieval scholastic theologians observed a similar paradox between man's desire to seek understanding and his inability to perceive the absolute truth. David Williams, *Deformed Discourse* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), p. 5. See also, Albrecht Classen, 'The Epistemological Function of Monsters in the Middle Ages', *Lo Sguardo*, Vol. 9, 2 (2012), pp. 13-34.

[21] A belief that monsters did exist in the remote parts of the medieval world does not, Williams argues, affect the allegorical function of monsters as creatures of the imagination. They are at once part of the natural order, beings that inhabit the displaced regions of Earth (far enough away that they cannot be empirically identified), and a sign that corresponds to a referent that does not exist (p. 11). However, for further criticism on monsters as 'other' races of humans that existed within the natural world, see John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000); Paul Freedman, 'The Medieval Other', in *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations*, ed. by Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), pp. 1-26; and Stephen T. Asma, *On Monsters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

development when that child first identifies itself through an image-based register of experience. During this developmental period, the child's notion of the self is split between a subjective comprehension of its own desires (things that are perpetually external to the self), and an image of itself as a complete object. The mirror stage thus creates a paradox of understanding which is retained throughout our lives: we strive to see ourselves as complete beings, but our desires (which are influenced by social, cultural, historic, and various other external factors) prevent us from feeling entirely whole.[22]

It is through an understanding of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory that this thesis interprets how faeries operate within the context of medieval romance. Faeries embody superlative examples of humanity who mirror the ideals of the centralised aristocratic court. They reflect the aspirations and desires of medieval aristocratic society – after all, they are frequently depicted as exemplars of wealth, beauty, hospitality, and sexual vivacity, and they inhabit realms that are often marked by an absence of death and disease – but they are also removed from that culture in such a way that marks them out as distinctly 'other'. The hero's engagement with these faerie characters represents an act of wish fulfilment in which the hero seeks to obtain a version of that idealised image for themselves, either through assimilation to the otherworld or by overcoming it. In Marie de France's *Lanval*, for example, the hero encounters a faerie who is wealthier than both the Assyrian Queen Semiramis and the Roman Emperor Augustus at a time when he is most in need of financial aid (82-6).[23] Likewise, in *Sir Orfeo*, the faerie king's power over the mortal world and his ability to halt the

[22] This is further compounded by the development of language (a symbolic register of experience) and our comprehension of the word 'I', which also suggests a complete objectivity. A person's life is thus spent seeking for this unattainable unity (the 'ideal-I') which is developed through visual and symbolic registers of experience. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. by Bruce Fink (London: Norton, 2006), pp. 75-81.

[23] Marie de France, *Œuvres Completes*, ed. Yorio Otaka (Tokyo: Kazama, 1987).

onset of death (as evidenced by the courtyard filled with people who have been snatched into faerie land at the moment of their death, 385-404) stand in contrast to Orfeo's own inability to safeguard his kingdom and to keep his wife from harm. Encounters with faeries in romance thus instigate a process of change in which the protagonist endeavours to obtain (or reacquire) an idealised image of themselves through their interaction with a superlative image of medieval aristocracy. However, the volatility of these encounters and the potential for faeries to both punish and reward individuals demonstrate the awareness that medieval authors had of the difficulty of achieving a version of selfhood that reflects the ideals imposed upon an individual by a society. Faeries might help the protagonist toward their goal, or they might be just as likely to trap that person within the otherworld forever, stripping them of their humanity in the process.[24]

This chapter therefore builds on those arguments presented by Cooper and Wade that draw attention to the recurring motifs associated with faeries in medieval literature and their ability to adapt to different socio-historical contexts and narrative requirements. Despite the apparent ambiguity and unexplainable nature of faeries in romance, their function across many romance texts is actually surprisingly consistent; in fact, this depiction of a superlative (if dangerous) image of medieval courtly society can also be found in narratives that pre-date the romances of the twelfth century. In neither *Immram Brain* nor *Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed* are the supernatural characters described as faeries. However, this is no different to many of the

[24] It is for this reason that *Lanval* presents us with a dilemma in relation to its ending: namely, is Lanval's final journey into the otherworld meant to be happy or sad? Lanval has won back his faerie mistress and (presumably) all of the wealth and luxury that she brings with her. However, he is also taken away from the court that helped to define him as an exemplar of courtly etiquette (the very reason that his faerie mistress sought him out in the first place), and he is effectively stripped of his humanity by his displacement to the faerie realm. Marie's concluding lines – 'Nul humme n'en oi plus parler / Ne jeo n'en sai avant cunter' ('No one has heard any more about him, / Nor can I relate any more', 645-6) – coupled with Lanval's earlier claim that he will forsake all people for the mysterious maiden ('Pur vus guerpirai tutes genz', 128), is thus intended to generate a degree of uncertainty in relation to Lanval's fate.

examples given by Wade in which the ambiguity surrounding faerie ontology is an intentional part of the cultivation of meaning within the text. The mysterious lady at the beginning of *Brain* and the otherworldly figures of Arawn and Rhiannon in *Pwyll* all exhibit traits that identify them as faeries, and so this chapter will now turn to an analysis of these texts that highlights this possibility.

The Land of Women in *Immram Brain*

The earliest extant version of *Immram Brain maic Febuil* (*The Voyage of Bran, Son of Febul*) comes from the twelfth-century manuscript MS 23 E 25 (Lebor na hUidre, the Book of the Dun Cow), but an older version of the story is thought to date from the late seventh or early eighth century, and it contains elements that are believed to derive from much older Irish mythological sources as well.[25] Bran's story begins when he hears strange music whilst walking alone in the lands near to his hall. The music lulls Bran to sleep with its sweetness, and when he awakes, he finds a silver tree branch covered in white blossoms beside him. Returning home with the branch, Bran is confronted by a mysterious woman dressed in 'unusual attire' (2) who sings before the assembled guests of the hall and instructs Bran to set off on a voyage in search of the 'Land of the Women' (30). The next day, Bran puts to sea with twenty-six companions and three ships. During the voyage, they encounter the Irish sea deity Manannán mac Lir, who rides a chariot across the waves and sings to Bran about the otherworldly realm of Mag Mell and about Manannán's son Mongán (a legendary Irish prince

[25] Mac Mathúna, 'Introduction' to *Immram Brain*, p. 1.

whose death is recorded in the Irish Annals).[26] Bran's crew then come to the Island of Joy, an island filled with inhabitants who can only laugh and stare at the passing ships (and swelled in number by one of Bran's crew, who goes ashore and has to be left behind), before finally reaching the Land of Women, a magical island with an ever-replenishing supply of food. Bran and his crew stay there for what they believe is one year before returning home again, despite the inhabitants of the Land of Women advising them not to leave. When Bran's ship arrives on the shores of Ireland, the locals have only heard of his voyage as an ancient legend: something that happened hundreds of years ago. One of Bran's crew attempts to leap out onto the shore, but he is turned to ash when his feet touch dry land.

The otherworldly signifiers that appear throughout Bran's story place this text within a tradition that draws heavily on themes derived from Irish mythology. For Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, Early Irish tales that centre on an otherworldly adventure can be separated into three main categories: *Echtraí* (adventures), *Immrama* (voyages), and *Físi* (visions).[27] Bhrolcháin argues that the distinguishing factor for each of these modes relates to the religious connotations of the otherworldly realm and its inhabitants. *Físi* literature exists in both Latin and Irish and focuses specifically on Christian depictions of Heaven and Hell (i.e. *Purgatorium Patricii*, *Visio Tnugdali*, *Fís Adomnáin*, and *Aisling Meic Conglinne*). *Immrama* – the most famous being *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* (the *Voyage of Saint Brendan*) – are stories that emphasise predominantly Christian themes whilst also incorporating imagery related to non-Christian otherworlds (aside from Brendan's voyage, the three surviving examples of this genre are *Immram Curaig Maíle Dúin*, *Immram Snédgusa ocus Maic Riagla*, and *Immram ua*

[26] *The Annals of Ulster*, ed. by Pádraig Bambury and Stephen Beechinor, *CELT: The Corpus of Electronic Texts* <https://celt.ucc.ie//published/T100001A/index.html> accessed 03.03.2020.

[27] Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Introduction to Early Irish Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), p. 78.

Corra). *Echtraí*, on the other hand, feature heroic journeys into otherworlds that make no mention of Heaven or Hell and that seem to derive from older, oral sources (i.e. *Echtra Conli*, *Echtra Laegairi*, *Serglige Con Culainn*, and *Echtra Cormaic*).

Immram Brain falls somewhere between the categories of *Echtraí* and *Immrama*. As a voyage narrative, Bran's tale has much in common with other examples of this mode: the story centres on the motif of a sea voyage to an otherworldly (utopian) realm, the majority of the tale is taken up with the account of the journey itself, and the voyagers encounter different insular locations along the way.[28] However, *Immram Brain* also includes certain features that associate it more closely to *Echtraí*. Bran is invited to the otherworld by a mysterious, supernatural figure; his journey contains references to known mythological and historical characters (the Irish sea deity Manannán mac Lir and the heroic seventh-century prince Mongán mac Fiachnai); and, despite Bran's attempt to return to Ireland, he cannot re-enter the mortal realm at the story's conclusion, thus becoming something of a mythical, otherworldly figure himself.[29]

For James Carney, *Brain*'s connection to an older tradition of mythical adventure stories hints at the existence of an earlier *Echtraí* version of the tale in which Bran journeys to an otherworldly realm, also inhabited by women, by entering through a well. Evidence for this earlier version can be found in a text known as the *Dialogue*, an eight-stanza poem which survives in two manuscripts dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (as Carney argues, both of these appear to be derived from a much older common original).[30] As such, it

[28] See Bhrolcháin for a description of the main differences between *Echtraí* and *Immrama* (p. 81).

[29] *Echtra Conli* ends in a similar way, with Conla being taken to live permanently on an island inhabited by immortal women (Bhrolcháin, pp. 82-3).

[30] One of these manuscripts (Dublin, Trinity College MS. H.4.22) is known to have taken material from a lost eighth-century manuscript called the Cín Dromma Snechta: James Carney, 'The Earliest Bran Material', in *The*

is likely that this hypothetical 'Echtrae Brain' provides a source for some of the motifs that appear in the existing version of the story. For example, Carney sees the transference of the otherworldly realm from within a well to across an ocean as evidence of a process of rationalisation of older Irish mythologies in which otherworldly races were thought to dwell under water.[31] Carney's analysis thus indicates that the concept of a Celtic otherworldly realm full of ambiguous, seemingly immortal human figures has a much longer history than can be evidenced in the surviving textual records.

This connection to an older Celtic otherworldly tradition is also recognised by Howard Rollin Patch, who identifies various repeated themes and motifs that appear throughout Early Irish literature. Of these, the most prominent to appear in *Brain* is that of the island, a location that is closely linked to Celtic otherworldly tradition through examples such as Mag Mell (a mythical realm of death similar to Elysium and frequently located on an island far to the west of Ireland), Tír na nÓg (an island of everlasting youth), and Emain Ablach (the 'Isle of Apples', considered to be the realm of Manannán mac Lir).[32]

This connection is further emphasised by the identification of Bran's silver branch as belonging to an 'apple-tree of Emain' (3) and the description of the Land of Women as a beautiful realm 'Without sorrow, without grief, without death, / without any sickness, [and] without debility from wounds' (10). The unusual passage of time within the Land of Women also relates *Brain* to similar tales such as *Echtrae Tadhg Mac Céin*, *Laoi Oisín ar Tír na nÓg*,

Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature, ed. by Jonathan M. Wooding (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 73-4.

[31] Ibid, p. 86.

[32] Howard Rollin Patch, *The Other World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 27. See also Hy-Brasil (a phantom island cloaked in mist, thought to lie in the Atlantic Ocean). Geoffrey of Monmouth mentions *Insula pomorum* (the Island of Apples) as the home of Morgan le Fay and her nine sisters in his *Vita Merlini*, ed. and trans. by Basil Clarke (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973), ll. 908-24.

and *Echtra Nerai*, all of which use temporal distortion as a means of indicating otherworldliness (although in *Echtra Nerai*, the distortion of time is reversed and the hero returns to the mortal realm at exactly the same moment that he left it).[33]

In addition to the significant influence of Irish mythology on the supernatural landscapes of *Brain*, it is also worth bearing in mind that this poem is separated from the romance tradition by a period of roughly five hundred years, and so it exhibits some distinct differences with regard to its form and meaning. Most notably, Bran's adventure differs from later romance quests in the lack of emphasis that is placed on individual human action within the poem. The journey to the Land of Women is not a solo venture, nor do deeds of heroism form an integral part of the construction of meaning within the poem. When the voyagers reach the Island of Joy, it is one of Bran's crew who goes ashore to investigate. Similarly, the decision to return home is instigated by Bran's companion Nechtan, not by Bran himself. Indeed, Bran's role within the poem is surprisingly passive. He is foregrounded within the story because of his status as a leader, rather than for the deeds he performs. The emphasis that is placed on a group of adventurers thus compares more readily to the broader societal focus of epic, *chanson de geste*, or pre-romance Arthurian literature such as *Culhwch ac Olwen*.

[33] Patch, pp. 58-9. Whilst Patch emphasises the role that time distortion plays in Celtic depictions of the otherworld, other critics have highlighted its importance in other cultures as well. Thompson and Balys, for example, draw attention to Indian oral traditions in which a 'Supernatural lapse of time in Fairyland' features prominently: Stith Thompson and Jonas Balys, *The Oral Tales of India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958), p. 180. The motif even persists in modern fiction. C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, for example, distinguishes between Narnia and wartime Britain by having the protagonists grow to adulthood whilst inside the supernatural realm, but then revert to childhood when they return to the mortal world: C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (London: HarperCollins, 2001). For more on this topic, see Roseanna Cross, ''Heterochronia' in *Thomas of Erceldoune*, *Guingamor*, 'The Tale of King Herla', and *The Story of Mediadoc, King of Cambria*', *Neophilologus*, Vol. 92 (2008), pp. 163-85.

However, many of the otherworldly signifiers that we find in *Brain* are recognisable as motifs that are closely associated with the faerie sign in romance. Islands, for example, are one of several natural features (along with forests, caves, and streams) that are frequently identified in connection with faerie realms, the most famous example being the island of Avalon to which King Arthur is taken after being mortally wounded.[34] Strange lands that can only be reached by crossing water (usually with some form of magical assistance) are pervasive throughout romance. In Marie de France's *Guigemar*, the hero is transported to a mysterious kingdom by a magical, rudderless ship. Whilst there, he meets a beautiful maiden who appears to be human in most respects, but who also possesses a gift for prophecy that hints at her supernatural qualities (543-8). The twelfth-century *Partonopeus de Blois* follows a very similar story arc in which a magical boat transports the hero to a deserted city where he meets a beautiful sorceress named Melior.[35] And in Book II of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Guyon encounters a faerie called Phaedria who traps unwary travellers on her island in the '*Idle lake*' (II.vi.10-22).[36]

Each of these examples are connected by the powerful female figures who are implicated in initiating the hero's journey over water. In a similar way, Bran's voyage to the Land of Women is only made possible through the interjection and instruction of the mysterious woman who visits him at the beginning of the story. Here, an association with the faerie sign in romance can be identified through the woman's supernatural abilities – Bran is

[34] James Wade argues that, despite the mutability of Avalon as a supernatural location, it exists throughout the Middle Ages in various different fictional and non-fictional texts as a 'culturally entrenched motif' that maintains strong ties to the faerie realm (see Wade's chapter 'Avalon: Simulacra and Fictional Facts', in *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, pp. 39-71).

[35] *Le Roman de Partonopeu de Blois*, ed. and trans. by Olivier Collet and Pierre-Marie Joris (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2005).

[36] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. by A. C. Hamilton et al., 2nd edn. (London: Pearson, 2007). Hereafter cited in text.

described as having no strength in his hand to keep the silver branch from her, and when she departs from Bran's hall, she vanishes so suddenly that the guests are left in a state of confusion (31) – but beyond this, there is also an ambiguity relating to the lack of explanation for her sudden appearance. At a non-diegetic level, her interjection functions as a catalyst for the events of Bran's story in a similar way to the faerie king's kidnapping of Heurodis in *Sir Orfeo* or the sudden appearance of the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.[37] However, as in both of these cases, no clear explanation for her sudden appearance during their initial meeting is given within the narrative.[38] The seemingly arbitrary nature of the mysterious woman's appearance thus engages the audience in a process of speculation and interpretation, encouraging them to search for meaning within the text by leaving her ontology and intentions unclear. As a result, the poem challenges the reader to consider why Bran has been chosen for this journey, and what implication this might have for the story's troubling conclusion.

The question of how we interpret Bran's interaction with this otherworldly island filled with faerie-like beings thus relates to the way that we situate this text within the social and cultural contexts surrounding its creation. Here, it is briefly worth turning to various critical studies that consider whether *Brain* represents a seventh- or eighth-century Christian interpretation of Irish mythological tradition. James Carney, for example, interprets *Immram Brain* as a Christian allegory that is primarily concerned with the search for Paradise, thus

[37] In addition, Bran's discovery of an apple-tree branch (taken from the Isle of Apples) after he wakes from an enchanted sleep (2-3) shares some similarities with Heurodis falling asleep 'Vnder a fair ympe-tre [grafted apple tree]' prior to being taken away into faerie land (70).

[38] More will be said on the topic of Morgan le Fay's reasons for sending the Green Knight to Arthur's court in chapter three of this thesis.

suggesting a thoroughly Christian conception of the otherworld.[39] In support of this, he cites various instances of Christian influences within the poem. For example, when Bran's crew encounter Manannán mac Lir, the sea deity explains that the inhabitants of his otherworldly kingdom are untouched by death because 'the sin [i.e. the Fall] has not reached us' (44). Similarly, Manannán prophesises the birth of Mongán mac Fiachnai in a passage that directly compares the Irish hero to Christ (47-50). In essence, Carney argues that, although some of the imagery found in *Brain* may represent remnants of an older pre-Christian mythology, there is little reason to suppose that these images retain any of their former function or meaning.

Whilst Carney is keen to emphasise the large gap that exists between pre-Christian systems of belief in Ireland and the composition of *Brain*, other critics have suggested that the text does still identify and engage with elements of an older pagan tradition. Prionsias Man Cana, for example, sees the author's intention as broadly synthetical, creating 'an aesthetic rapport between the pagan concept of the otherworld and the Christian concept of Paradise'.[40] *Brain* inhabits something of a transitionary period in early medieval Irish literature: caught between the modes of *Echtraí* and *Immrama* and existing in a fully Christianised medieval Ireland, but still clinging to the imagery of Ireland's pre-Christian past. Consequently, Bran's interaction with the otherworld draws attention to these two converging worldviews by emphasising the beauty and opulence associated with the Land of Women, but also the danger that it represents as a space outside of the confines of Christian

[39] James Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955), pp. 280-95

[40] Prionsias Man Cana, 'The Sinless Otherworld of *Immram Brain*', in *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature*, 52-72, p. 52. Originally published in *Ériu*, Vol. 27 (1976), pp. 95-115. See also, Myles Dillon, *Early Irish Literature* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1948); and Joseph F. Nagy, 'Close encounters of the traditional kind in medieval Irish literature', in *Celtic Folklore and Christianity*, ed. by Patrick K. Ford (Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin, 1983), pp. 129-49.

orthodoxy. The voyage transports Bran from the recognisable landscapes of Christian Ireland to unfamiliar insular settings governed by ancient Irish deities and enigmatic supernatural women. As a result of their inability to return to the mortal world, Bran and his crew are made otherworldly through their adventure. They are cast into a space that is neither earthly nor spiritual but caught somewhere in between.

Time distortion as a signifier of otherworldliness appears in a number of texts involving supernatural encounters throughout the Middle Ages. Interestingly, many of these stories also identify faeries as existing on the fringes of Christian orthodoxy in a manner similar to the Land of Women in *Brain*. Walter Map's tale of King Herla in *De Nugis Curialium*, for instance, gives an account of Herla's journey through a cave into an otherworldly realm where he and his company feast and drink for three days as guests of a *pigmei* (pygmy) king.[41] When Herla returns to his own kingdom, he discovers that hundreds of years have passed and that neither he nor his company can step onto the earth without turning to ash. Map identifies his story as associated with the legend of the Wild Hunt, a group of mythical, spectral hunters who were sometimes spotted riding through the mortal world.[42] However, as in all of Map's accounts of unexplainable supernatural phenomena, there is also a didactic function to the story. Map compares the lamentable, restless wanderings of the Wild Hunt to the corruption that exists within the royal court (and indeed all courts across Europe).[43] Through this

[41] Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, pp. 26-31.

[42] The legend of the Wild Hunt was subject to wide variation across medieval Europe and has been associated with Diana, Odin, Herodias, King Arthur, and Satan (to name just a few). For more on the Wild Hunt and its appearance in medieval literature, see Anne Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993), pp. 34-9; and Ronald Hutton, 'The Wild Hunt and the Witches' Sabbath', *Folklore*, Vol. 125, 2 (2014), pp. 161-78.

[43] Map, pp. 30-1.

strategy, he presents the Wild Hunt as a mirror image of the central aristocratic society in much the same way as the faerie sign is used by romance writers.

Another example of this time distortion motif can be found in the fifteenth-century *Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*. Here, the protagonist travels to 'ane oþer countree' (93) at the behest of a shape-shifting faerie queen who shows Thomas the different roads that lead to heaven, hell, paradise, purgatory, and faerie land.[44] Thomas spends three days as a guest in the faerie king and queen's castle, but when he returns to his own world he discovers that he has been there for 'thre ȝere & more' (286).[45] Here, faerie land is positioned quite literally as a landscape that is distinct from both Christian and earthly realms. However, Thomas' encounter does end on a happier note than Bran's and Herla's adventures in the otherworld. The faerie queen helps Thomas to escape faerie land before the Devil can claim him as a tribute (289-92) and rewards him with the gift of prophecy once he is back in his own realm (345-6).[46]

Whilst faerie encounters can be beneficial, then, there is seldom an example in which the hero emerges from the supernatural realm unchanged or unscathed. In each of these tales, faerie land serves as a location where the identity of the protagonist is put under threat by their separation from both earthly and spiritual realms. For Bran and Herla, this loss of identity relates to the loss of their mortality, whilst Thomas narrowly avoids being mistaken for a faerie tribute and dragged into Hell. Linking this to the role that faeries play as superlative mirror images of the aristocratic court, Bran's journey to the Land of Women

[44] *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune Printed from Five Manuscripts*, ed. by James A. H. Murray, EETS OS 61 (London: Trübner, 1875). The above citation (and all citations hereafter) are taken from the Thornton manuscript, unless otherwise stated.

[45] In the Cambridge manuscript, Thomas spends 'seuen ȝere and more' in faerie land.

[46] The prophecies include recognisable historic events such as the battles of Halidon Hill (352) and Bannockburn (379).

draws attention to the limitations of material and earthly ideals – beauty, wealth, immortality – that ultimately serve no purpose within Heaven. There is less of a focus on individual deeds here than in romances such as *Thomas of Erceldoune*. Even so, the revelation of a land without death and disease tantalises the reader with notions of immortality and infinite harvest, whilst the story's conclusion asks the reader to consider the potential loss of humanity (or loss of God) that accompanies such a discovery. By entering into the Land of Women, Bran and his crew effectively remove themselves from both the social and religious orthodoxies of early medieval Ireland: they become otherworldly.

Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed: Arawn and Rhiannon

Further evidence for the faerie sign before the advent of romance literature can be found in *Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed* (*Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed)*. The original composition of this text may date back as far as the eleventh century and it is generally believed that the story is based on oral folkloric and mythological sources that go back further still. Sioned Davies, for example, draws attention to possible traces of an older oral tradition within *Pwyll*, citing its 'memorability', its 'onomastic tags', and the importance of voiced performance within the text itself as evidence of its transmission by word of mouth.[47] However, a degree of caution is also required here regarding its date of composition. As one of the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi*, the story appears in two complete manuscript sources, the White Book of Rhydderch (c. 1350) and the Red Book of Hergest (1382 – c.1410), roughly two centuries after Chrétien de Troyes began writing his romances.[48] As a result, whilst the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* are generally

[47] *The Mabinogion*, trans. by Sioned Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. xiii-xvii.

[48] Ibid, p. ix.

believed to belong to an earlier literary tradition, the late date of the two surviving manuscripts complicates our ability to distinguish which elements of the text relate to an earlier source and which have been influenced by later romances.

The first part of *Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed* plays out like a miniature romance quest condensed into just a few pages. Pwyll's story begins when he encounters a pack of otherworldly hunting dogs (described as shining white with red ears) chasing a stag through a forest.[49] Pwyll drives the dogs away, letting his own hounds feast on the stag instead, but in doing so he angers a mysterious figure who introduces himself as Arawn, king of Annfwn. Arawn is insulted by Pwyll's lack of etiquette and he demands that the two rulers trade places in recompense for the slight. Pwyll and Arawn switch bodies, and Pwyll spends one year in Annfwn, during which time he defeats a rival king called Hafgan in single combat. Pwyll reunites with Arawn and the two rulers praise each other's good governance before returning to their own countries once more. When Pwyll arrives home, he asks his noblemen whether his leadership over the past year had differed in any way. They respond by telling him that 'never have you been so perceptive; never have you been such a kind young man; never have you been so ready to distribute your wealth; never have you ruled better than during this year'.[50] Pwyll tells them the story of his adventure and promises that he will continue to rule in the same manner from that day forward.

For Sioned Davies, both the hunting dogs and the name 'Annfwn' establish a direct connection to the Celtic otherworld. The colouring of the dogs is a characteristic found in Welsh and Irish folklore, and Annwfn – derived from *an* ('in, inside') and *dwfn* ('world') –

[49] For a discussion on the connection between faeries and red-eared white animals, see Jessica Hemming, '*Bos Primigenius* in Britain: Or, Why Do Fairy Cows Have Red Ears?', *Folklore*, Vol. 113, 1 (2002), pp. 71-82.

[50] Ibid, p. 8.

appears in both traditions as an otherworldly realm that is situated either on an island or under the earth.[51] However, many of the supernatural elements found in *Pwyll* are also consistent with themes and motifs associated with the faerie sign in a number of significant ways. For instance, Pwyll's adventure begins when he becomes separated from the rest of his hunting party. In romance, isolation operates as a useful signifier of an impending supernatural encounter. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for instance, Gawain isolates himself during the poem's second fitt by leaving Arthur's court in search of the Green Knight's chapel. Likewise, Lanval is isolated from Arthur's court at the beginning of Marie de France's lay. And in *Sir Orfeo*, the hero spends ten years alone in the forest before eventually discovering a way into faerie land.[52]

In addition to this, the emphasis that *Pwyll* places on hunting in a woodland setting makes it comparable to several examples of otherworldly encounters in romance. *The Wedding of Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, for instance, begins with Arthur and 'alle his bold knyghtes' (17) hunting in Inglewood Forest near Carlisle.[53] Arthur chases a deer through a thicket of ferns, isolating himself from the rest of his court in the process, and comes across a strange knight called 'Gromer Somer Joure' (the Knight of Summer's Day, 62) who challenges Arthur to discover 'whate wemen love best' (91). Likewise, Marie de France's *Guigemar* begins with the hero shooting a deer whilst hunting in a forest. In this instance, the otherworldly encounter is with the deer itself: a creature that is described as a pure white

[51] Ibid, p. 228.

[52] Separation from a hunting party does not necessarily imply an encounter with faeries, but it does frequently result in interactions with the supernatural. In the alliterative *Awntyrs off Arthur* (late fourteenth or early fifteenth century), for example, Gawain and Guinevere (Gaynour) are isolated from the rest of Arthur's hunting party at the edge of a small lake (2-13) where they encounter the ghost of Guinevere's mother (92-160) who prophesises the downfall of Arthur's kingdom (287-312). See *Sir Gawain*, ed. by Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

[53] Ibid.

hind ('Tute fu blaunche cele beste', 91), but with the antlers of a stag. Guigemar fires an arrow into the animal's forehead, but the arrow rebounds into his leg, causing him to fall from his horse. In retaliation, the hind curses Guigemar, telling him that his wound will never heal without the assistance of a woman who will suffer for his love ('Ki suffera pur tue amur', 115).[54]

As in these examples, the hunting motif introduced at the beginning of *Pwyll* helps to establish the potential for a supernatural encounter within the story. Indeed, hunting grounds in particular seem to function as ideal spaces to situate a boundary to the otherworld, thanks largely to the inherent liminality of managed parkland.[55] In effect, such landscapes allegorise the vague boundary that exists between the civilised world and the unknown wildernesses that lie beyond. They create an environment in which the limits of human comprehension can be tested. More specifically though, they constitute a space in which the isolated individual can be challenged by separating them from the familiar world of the court.

Arawn's function within the story thus closely corresponds with the role that faeries play in romance as arbiters of human action. This is most clearly demonstrated by the tests that Pwyll must undergo whilst he is in Annfwn. Like many romance knights, Pwyll is required to demonstrate his martial prowess in combat. To this end, the battle with Hafgan at the end of Pwyll's year in Annfwn certainly highlights his capability as a warrior:

[54] Stories involving otherworldly encounters whilst hunting are not limited to Celtic depictions of the supernatural. In the classical story of Diana and Actaeon, for example, Actaeon is transformed into a stag (and subsequently torn apart by his own dogs) for spying on the goddess whilst she is bathing in a spring. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by David Raeburn (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 101-2.

[55] Anne Rooney, *Hunting in Middle English Literature*, p. 64.

> With that the two knights approached each other towards the middle of the ford for the fight. And at the first attack, the man who was in Arawn's place strikes Hafgan in the centre of the boss of his shield, so that it splits in half, and all his armour shatters, and Hafgan is thrown the length of his arm and spear-shaft over his horse's crupper to the ground, suffering a fatal blow.[56]

However, the passage is also a relatively formulaic description of a battle that appears in a number of places throughout the collected works of *The Mabinogion*.[57] The brevity of the description thus suggests that the fight itself is not necessarily the point. Rather, the emphasis here is on fidelity as an ideal characteristic of nobility. As Pwyll is in disguise during the battle, any glory associated with the victory goes directly to Arawn. Pwyll has nothing to gain from fighting Hafgan, and so his only motivation is the promise that he has made.

In a further sign that the text is concerned with establishing Pwyll's fidelity, there is evidence to suggest that he is also being tested in other ways during his time in Annfyn. When Arawn returns to Annfwn, for example, his wife is surprised when the couple 'indulge in affectionate play', declaring that Arawn has not so much as spoken to her in bed over the previous year.[58] Arawn tells her about the year that Pwyll has spent in his place and both characters agree that Pwyll demonstrated great loyalty and restraint in resisting 'the temptations of the flesh'.[59] The passage brings to mind Gawain's encounter with Lady Bertilak

[56] *The Mabinogion*, p. 6.

[57] Ibid, p. 229, n. 6.

[58] Ibid, p. 7.

[59] Ibid.

in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which Gawain must resist similar temptations whilst honouring the gift giving game that has been instigated by Lord Bertilak. Whilst Arawn does not appear to have considered Pwyll's sexual abstinence as part of the initial reparation owed to Arawn for the chasing away of his hounds (indeed, he seems genuinely surprised to discover that Pwyll has not slept with his wife), Pwyll's restraint is described in such a way that it further emphasises his honour.

Within the context of the faerie sign and its relation to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, then, Arawn represents a superlative mirror image of medieval Welsh aristocracy to which Pwyll must aspire: the fact that he functions as a mirror is clear from the ease with which each character can assume the other's identity. Thus, whilst the initial encounter with Arawn may appear arbitrary, the intervention of the otherworld in this instance serves a specific purpose by testing the protagonist's adherence to certain social codes. The trial that Pwyll undergoes within the otherworldly kingdom instigates a transitional stage in his life. He is young and reckless when he first meets Arawn (as represented by his lack of etiquette in chasing away Arawn's hunting dogs), but he becomes a strong and sensible ruler as a result of his experiences in Annfyn, promising to uphold the same high standards of governance once he returns to Dyfed. Here, the emphasis that is placed on an individual's actions as part of a process of self-discovery establishes a clear point of comparison between Pwyll's initial adventure and the knightly quest narratives of romance. As such, Arawn's function is closer to that of the faerie sign in romance than to the inhabitants of the Land of Women in *Immram Brain*.

That being said, whilst Arawn conforms to many aspects of the faerie sign, his actions and motivations are surprisingly cogent. In particular, the discussion between Arawn and his wife presents us with an unusual (albeit brief) example of an otherworldly quest narrative

being told from the perspective of a faerie or supernatural other. Furthermore, the author concludes this section of Pwyll's story by describing the long-lasting friendship that develops between Pwyll and Arawn. Whilst faerie romances occasionally end with humans or faeries assimilating into the supernatural or natural world – usually in stories concerning faerie lovers (see, for example, *Lanval*, *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, and *The Wedding of Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*) – it is rare to find an example in which a connection between realms is maintained without either party undergoing a significant ontological transformation. In a similar way to the examples of *Culhwch* and *Rhonabwy* put forward by Fulton, then, Pwyll's close affinity to the otherworld also serves to elevate the status of early medieval Wales by associating Welsh sovereignty with magic.

The second and third parts of *Pwyll* continue in a similar vein, staging interactions with the supernatural realm as a means of exploring transitions in Pwyll's development as a person whilst simultaneously elevating his status as a ruler. From this point on, the story is primarily concerned with his marriage to Rhiannon and the birth of their son Pryderi. Rhiannon, in particular, possesses many characteristics that indicate her otherworldly status. The name Rhiannon is itself generally thought to derive from Rigantona (meaning 'the Great, or Divine Queen'), a possible variation of the Gallo-Roman horse goddess Epona.[60] Furthermore, as Jessica Hemming suggests, there are a number of moments in the text that may indicate Rhiannon's origin as a Celtic horse deity. After all, she possesses a magical steed; the penance she suffers for (supposedly) eating her son Pryderi is to carry people on her back like a horse;

[60] Ibid, p. 230, n. 11.

Pryderi appears to share a close affinity with horses; and he is also stolen away by a monster who is known for snatching foals from stables.[61]

Pwyll first encounters Rhiannon while visiting a barrow that is said to wound or reward any nobleman who sits upon it.[62] Rhiannon rides past Pwyll and his assembled courtiers on three consecutive days, but despite their best efforts, they are unable to catch up with her: Rhiannon's horse always manages to remain ahead of them, even though it appears to move at a slow and steady pace. Eventually, Pwyll calls out to Rhiannon, entreating her to stop for the sake of the man that she loves most in the world. She does so immediately and tells Pwyll that she has travelled specifically to find him, that she loves him, but that she is betrothed to marry another against her will. Pwyll must journey to her father's kingdom in order to prevent the marriage and to win her for himself.

As with Arawn and the inhabitants of the Land of Women, there are a number of signifiers here that correspond closely with the faerie sign in romance. In addition to her proximity to the liminal setting of the barrow and her possession of a magical horse, Rhiannon's otherworldliness is emphasised most clearly through the description of her great beauty and wealth. When Pwyll first sees Rhiannon, she is wearing a garment made entirely of brocaded golden silk (a somewhat lavish outfit for riding through the countryside on horseback). Similarly, when she removes her veil for the first time, he is so taken with her beauty that he immediately considers all other women unattractive by comparison.[63] This

[61] Jessica Hemming, 'Reflections on Rhiannon and the Horse Episodes in "Pwyll"', *Western Folklore*, Vol. 57, 1 (1998), pp. 20-1. See also Edward Anwyl, 'The Value of the *Mabinogion* for the Study of Celtic Religion', in *Transactions of the Third International Congress for the History of Religions*, ed. P. S. Allen, 2 Vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908), II, pp. 234-44; and W. J. Gruffydd, *Rhiannon* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1953).

[62] *The Mabinogion*, p. 8. With regard to Celtic tradition, Howard Rollin Patch describes 'the grave or barrow' as another common site for locating the otherworld (*The Other World*, p. 241).

[63] Ibid, pp. 8-10.

emphasis on extremes – being the *most* beautiful and the *most* finely dressed – is an aspect of the faerie sign that recurs repeatedly throughout the traditions of Breton lay and romance. In Marie de France's *Lanval*, for example, the beauty of Lanval's faerie lover plays a crucial part in the narrative structure of the lay. Lanval is put on trial when he declares his lady to be more attractive than the queen and he is only released again when the lady appears before the court and proves her beauty in front of the assembled crowd (583-92).

The magical, bottomless bag that Rhiannon gives to Pwyll (whether crafted by her own magic or simply a magical item in her possession, the author doesn't make clear) establishes another connection to the faerie sign through the propensity that faeries have for gifting magical artefacts to romance heroes. We see this in examples such as Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, in which Lancelot is granted a magical ring by the *fee* who raises him (2335-50). Lavish and seemingly endless gifts of wealth are also granted to Lanval:

> Un dun li ad dune après.
> Ja cele rien ne vudra més
> Que il nen ait a sun talent.
> Doinst e despende largement,
> Ele li troverat asez'.
>
> (135-9) [64]

[64] 'She gave him a boon, that henceforth he could wish for nothing which he would not have, and however generously he gave or spent, she would still find enough for him'. *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. and ed. by Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby, 2nd edn. (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 74-5.

And in Thomas Chestre's *Sir Launfal*, a fourteenth-century adaptation of Marie's lay, a faerie maiden named Tryamour gives the hero a white (possibly faerie) horse, a magical squire named Gyfre, and an 'alner' [purse] filled with a never-ending supply of gold (219-27).[65] In each instance, the gifting of magical items to the hero identifies that hero as worthy of otherworldly attention. In *Lanval*/*Launfal*, as in *Pwyll*, for example, the faerie maiden has travelled specifically for the purpose of finding the protagonist and declaring her love to him.

However, there is also an extent to which Rhiannon's status as an otherworldly denizen can be called into question. Mark Williams, for example, argues that there is a certain ambiguity surrounding Rhiannon's power. She possesses 'supernatural accoutrements' (the magical horse and the bottomless bag), but she demonstrates no innate otherworldly ability besides her possession of these artefacts.[66] Williams therefore questions whether Rhiannon's magical horse is even under her control, suggesting 'it is possible that the audience was supposed to understand that she *cannot* stop, unless asked to do so with a particular formula, and is in fact labouring under some kind of paternal curse or prohibition'.[67] Furthermore, it isn't entirely clear whether Rhiannon's country is intended to be an otherworldly space or just a neighbouring human kingdom. Her father's name – 'Hyfaidd Hen' or 'Hyffaid the Old' – certainly doesn't imply that he comes from a realm that is free from death and disease. Nor does the author mention anything particularly marvellous or unusual about Hyfaidd's court when Pwyll first arrives there.

[65] *Sir Launfal*, in *The Middle English Breton Lays*. See also, *Graelent*, in which a mysterious faerie maiden gives Graelent a horse that is 'the noblest, the swiftest and the [fastest] under the sun', along with many other treasures. *Graelent*, trans. by Eugene Mason (Cambridge, Ontario: In Parenthesis, 2001), p. 7.

[66] Williams, 'Magic and Marvels', p. 61.

[67] Ibid.

Rhiannon's otherworldly characteristics are emphasised just enough to make her identity a matter of uncertainty. She exhibits a sufficient number of human traits to be a suitable marriage partner for Pwyll, but her connection to the supernatural realm also serves to elevate Pwyll's status within the story. In a similar way to the examples of faerie gift giving mentioned above, Rhiannon's interest in Pwyll marks him out as a figure of special significance. Once again, the emphasis here is on Pwyll's development as a person during a transitionary stage of his life (marriage), whilst the proximity of the otherworld also serves to enhance his status as a ruler. However, Rhiannon's interactions with Pwyll do not constitute a test of his abilities in quite the same way as his encounter with Arawn. Pwyll must overcome Gwawl, the opposing suitor for Rhiannon's hand in marriage, but she effectively provides him with the solution to this problem. During the feast held for Gwawl and Rhiannon's wedding, Pwyll arrives dressed as a beggar and convinces Gwawl to climb into the magical, bottomless bag that has been given to him by Rhiannon. Gwawl does so, and Pwyll's men beat the bag until Gwawl submits (this, the author tells us, is the first time that 'Badger in the Bag' was played).[68] Rhiannon's role in devising the plan, Pwyll's reliance on other men's help, and the emphasis that the author places on this incident as an origin for a bizarre and violent custom thus leaves little room for Pwyll's own valour or heroism to be a factor in this instance.

Likewise, the final section of *Pwyll* places very little emphasis on a test of the hero's abilities as integral to the cultivation of meaning within the story. The focus here is on the kidnapping of Pryderi (Pwyll's son), by a mysterious monster with an 'enormous claw'.[69] However, rather than setting off in search of the monster, Pwyll is embroiled in a political

[68] *The Mabinogion*, p. 13-4. Davies suggests that this onomastic incident may have some connection to the practice of badger baiting: 'a sack would be placed over the mouth of the badger's den, and when the animal had run into the bag in would be beaten to death' (p. 230, n. 14).

[69] Ibid, p. 18.

scandal concerning his marriage to Rhiannon, who is accused by her maids of having eaten the child.[70] Pwyll's relationship to Rhiannon is questioned as a result of this revelation, causing his lords to place pressure on him to divorce and to find a new wife. The defeat of the monster, meanwhile, is left up to a neighbouring lord called Terynon, who chops off the creature's claw and eventually returns Pryderi to his parents. However, Terynon and his wife, who are unable to have a child of their own, are also forced to decide between keeping Pryderi or returning him to his rightful family. For both Pwyll and Terynon, then, the emphasis in this final section of the story is on issues of matrimony, childbirth, and succession. Here, the otherworld ceases to enhance Pwyll's reputation as a leader, and instead serves to destabilise the security of his family and his princedom. The author of *Pwyll* thus presents two opposing interpretations of the supernatural that place it in a continual and unresolvable state of tension within the story. As Williams has argued, magic and marvels come to represent the possibility of social catastrophe, but the return of Pryderi at the story's conclusion also means that such catastrophe is ultimately avoided.

As with *Immram Brain*, then, the similarity of the otherworldly motifs in *Pwyll* to those found in romance literature should not be overstated; the supernatural elements found in both of these stories serve a specific purpose related to the social and historical context in which they were written. In *Immram Brain*, a conflict between Celtic mythological tradition and Christian orthodoxy results in an otherworldly landscape that is enticing and beautiful, whilst simultaneously encapsulating a fear related to the protagonist's separation from

[70] In an act that receives distressingly little rebuke from the author, the six maids smear puppy blood over Rhiannon's face and hands and scatter bones around her bed while she is sleeping. In a folkloric context, this associates Rhiannon with the motif of the 'Calumniated Wife' (i.e. the falsely accused wife). See Juliette Wood, 'The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature', *Cambridge Medieval Welsh Studies*, Vol. 10 (Winter, 1985), pp. 25-38.

society and from God. By point of contrast, the otherworld in *Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed* does serve to enhance the reputation of those who come into contact with it, but it is equally able to destabilise and destroy. In both cases, a tension exists between a fascination with the mythical past, and an interpretation of the otherworld as a place of danger and corruption.

Even so, the themes and motifs that appear throughout *Brain* and *Pwyll* do suggest that these texts contain some of our earliest evidence for the faerie sign as it is identified within the context of romance. Here, we see elements of a Celtic otherworldly tradition – i.e. liminal spaces in nature, extreme wealth and beauty, and the gifting of supernatural artefacts – that come to be closely associated with romance faeries. Most significantly, Arawn, Rhiannon, and the inhabitants of the Land of Women are all ontologically ambiguous, and this allows them to function as superlative mirror images to aristocratic society in a similar way to later romance faeries. The bountiful and deathless realm of the Land of Women and the power and courtly splendour of figures such as Arawn and Rhiannon establish the hero's interaction with them as an attempt to obtain a version of that idealised image of medieval aristocratic society for themselves. At the same time, their existence on the fringes of civilisation draws attention to the danger that faeries represent for those who engage with them recklessly. Building on this sense of ambiguity as an essential aspect of the faerie sign, then, the next chapter will move on to an exploration of its existence within the context of Chrétien de Troyes' romances. Changes in courtly literature during the twelfth century had a significant impact on the way that faeries and faerie-like characters were used as a means of exploring idealised images of medieval aristocratic society, and it is in Chrétien's work that we most clearly see these changes taking shape.

Chapter Two:

Chrétien, Chivalry, and the Supernatural

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, faeries are ambiguous characters who straddle the boundary between human and other. It is this quality that allows them to function so effectively as a mirror image to society, whilst also representing something alien and potentially dangerous. For Chrétien de Troyes, however, the distinction between natural and supernatural is exceptionally complex and ambiguous. Chrétien frequently rationalises the fantastical, lends mystery to real-world events, and blends mythology with more realistic descriptions of people and places. In addition to this, explicit references to faeries are uncommon in Chrétien's work and they are named only when they have almost no narrative significance.[1] In *Erec et Enide*, for example, we are given a brief description of the 'Quatre fees' who help to fashion Erec's coronation robe 'Par grant sens et par grant maistrie' ['with great skill and great mastery'] (6736-7).[2] Each faerie adorns the robe with images depicting the four arts of the *quadrivium* (geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy), but they remain on the sidelines as unseen characters: Chrétien never causes them to appear before Erec or the court. Furthermore, Chrétien claims to have derived his understanding of the quadrivium from the fifth-century Latin writer Macrobius, but the reason for associating

[1] Critics concerned with romance faeries have tended to disregard Chrétien's work, instead turning to examples that define encounters with the supernatural realm more clearly. Helen Cooper, for instance, does not mention Chrétien at all in her chapter on faeries in *The English Romance in Time* (despite discussing Chrétien's contemporaries, Marie de France and Ulrich von Zatzikhoven), whilst James Wade's *Fairies in Medieval Romance* spends relatively little time discussing Chrétien's work in favour of romance quests that approach the topic of the supernatural more openly (although he does draw attention to the faerie gift-giving motif that appears in both *Erec et Enide* and *Yvain*, pp. 139-40).

[2] Chrétien de Troyes, *Romans* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1994). Hereafter cited in text. All translations are cited parenthetically in text and are taken from Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. by William W. Kibler and Carleton W. Carroll, revised edn. (London: Penguin, 2004).

faeries with this knowledge (considered part of the standard structure of university education in the twelfth century) is less clear. The faeries may be intended to elevate the magnificence of Erec's coronation, or they may simply be a remnant of Chrétien's source. Either way, whilst this brief allusion confirms that Chrétien had an awareness of faeries as supernatural beings, it does not form part of Chrétien's broader understanding of the associated themes and motifs of the faerie sign.[3]

The question of whether marvels and the supernatural should be taken seriously as an integral and meaningful part of Chrétien's romances has been a matter of debate amongst critics for some time.[4] For the most part, arguments that focus on Chrétien's use of *merveilleux* have drawn attention to the Celtic origins of magic in romance, most notably in the case of Roger Sherman Loomis, whose extensive examination of the traces of Breton folklore and wider Celtic mythology visible in the works of Chrétien de Troyes remains hugely influential to this day.[5] The connections that can be drawn between romance and early Irish and Welsh literatures resulted in widespread debate on the transmission and translation of

[3] Another example of Chrétien's knowledge of faeries can be seen in his account of Lancelot's upbringing in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*. Here, we are told that Lancelot was raised by a 'fee' who granted him a ring with the power to break any spell (2335-50). Whilst this character isn't named in Chrétien's text, she is identified elsewhere as the Lady of the Lake: a figure conventionally associated with faeries and with sorcery throughout Arthurian literary tradition. For a near-contemporary example (composed c.1194), see Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, *Lanzelet*, trans. by Thomas Kerth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 189-388.

[4] Some critics have chosen to see Chrétien's uncertain approach regarding the meaning and function of the supernatural as a flaw in his writing, arguing that Chrétien either exhibits a lack of understanding for his sources, or that the sources themselves were inconsistent or poorly written. For the former, see Gaston Paris's *Erec und Enide* (1891), cited in Lucienne Carasso-Bulow, *The Merveilleux in Chrétien de Troyes' Romances* (Genève: Libraire Droz, 1976), pp. 143-4. For the latter, see Roger Sherman Loomis' *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949).

[5] In addition to *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* and *Arthurian Tradition & Chrétien de Troyes*, see R. S. Loomis, *The Grail* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963). See also, Helaine Newstead, *Bran the Blessed in Arthurian Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939); Arthur C. L. Brown, *The Origin of the Grail Legend* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1943); Jean Marx, *La légende arthurienne et la grail* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952); and Myles Dillon, 'Les sources irlandaises des romans arthuriens', *Les Lettres Romanes*, Vol. 9 (1955), pp. 143-59. For a more recent appraisal of the Celtic influences in Chrétien's romances, see Joseph J. Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (London: Yale University Press, 2001).

British and Irish mythologies to the continent, particularly in relation to the various routes by which such influences might have reached Chrétien and the courts of Champagne. However, rather than providing greater insight into the function of the supernatural in romance, research into its Celtic antecedents has often downplayed the importance of magic as integral to the cultivation of meaning in Chrétien's writing. For Loomis, in particular, Chrétien's relationship to Celtic tradition served, at least in part, to 'relieve him of responsibility for the faults of construction and the lapses in coherence to which otherwise he would have to plead guilty'.[6]

Many other critics have similarly chosen to ignore or underestimate the role that magic and marvels play in romance. Eugene Vinaver, for example, argues that magical incidents and artefacts appear largely at random throughout the works of authors like Chrétien and thus have little to do with authorial intention.[7] For Lynette Muir, magic is either entirely ornamental (as in the case of the Sword Bridge in *Lancelot*) or instrumental for navigating through difficult plot points (such as the invisible ring that allows Yvain to stay alive within the walls of Laudine's castle).[8] Likewise, D. J. Barnett, building on arguments advanced by C. S. Lewis in his *Allegory of Love* (1936), suggests that Chrétien's romances convey meaning primarily through interactions between rationalised, humanised characters. According to this interpretation, the existence of the supernatural in Chrétien's work has no lasting impact upon the outcome or meaning of each romance.[9]

[6] Loomis, *Arthurian Tradition*, p. 6.

[7] Eugene Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 41.

[8] Lynette R. Muir, *Literature and Society in Medieval France* (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 83-5.

[9] D. J. Barnett, 'Chrétien's use of the supernatural', *English Studies in Africa*, Vol. 16, 2 (1973), pp. 71-5.

However, a few critics have also endeavoured to draw attention to Chrétien's purposeful engagement with magic as a literary device used to cultivate and enhance meaning within the text. Douglas Kelly, building on arguments advanced by Jean Fourquet, suggests that a greater emphasis should be placed on the *conjointure* of *matiere* and *san* in Chrétien's work.[10] He argues that there are two sides to Chrétien's writing: the side determined by the *merveilleux* (those parts derived from the *matiere* of his sources), and the *san* (his own authorial conception of the work). Kelly suggests that much of Chrétien's ability to create meaning lies in his careful manipulation of source materials. Accordingly, if elements of a supernatural tradition are retained in Chrétien's romances, it is because their incorporation serves to support his *san* in some way.

Likewise, Michelle Sweeney argues that more attention should be paid to the way that Chrétien chooses to rationalise some of the marvellous elements in his romances and not others.[11] In effect, Sweeney argues that Chrétien's marvels lend an air of supernatural intrigue to the story, but they also imbue his characters with the autonomy to shape their own destiny.

> Magical encounters force the characters to put to the test the strength of their sense of personal identity, their social status, and their faith in God. When a character requires magical devices – such as Yvain's need to hide with the aid of Lunete's ring – or is at the mercy of magical encounters – such as

[10] Douglas Kelly, 'Chrétien de Troyes: The Narrator and His Art', in *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. by Douglas Kelly (Lexington: French Forum, 1985), 13-47, p. 14; Jean Fourquet, 'Le Rapport entre l'œuvre et la source chez Chrétien de Troyes et le problème des sources bretonnes', *Romance Philology*, Vol. 9, 3 (1956), pp. 298-312.

[11] Michelle Sweeney, *Magic in the Medieval Romance from Chrétien de Troyes to Geoffrey Chaucer* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), p. 76.

> Lancelot's false encounter with lions at the Sword Bridge – it is clear that the character has not completely matured. [...] To achieve a balance between what are often competing or conflicting ideals or loyalties, Chrétien forces the characters to step outside the norms of Arthurian society so that they can develop their own independent sense of values.[12]

Chrétien's use of magic is thus consistently tied to the protagonist's development through formative challenges. Encounters with the supernatural serve to highlight the way that Chrétien's characters exercise free will and engage in a process of rational decision making. Sweeney continues by arguing that within this interpretation of the function of *merveilleux*, the reader effectively becomes a judge of the hero's deeds, observing the hero as he attempts to navigate the difficult social and moral choices that are laid out before him in settings that are intentionally ambiguous and uncertain.

Understanding Chrétien's engagement with the supernatural, then, requires that we also explore its function in relation to the knightly protagonists who are the central focus of these texts. Chrétien's romances – composed during a period of significant social, theological, and ideological upheaval in Western European thought – engaged themes of courtliness, love, chivalry, and the discovery of self. By writing about the exploits of knightly protagonists, Chrétien was responding to the rising status of the warrior classes in the courts of northern France, but he was also influenced by an increasing focus on individuality in both religious thought and twelfth-century court poetry (as well as existing traditions of epic, historical, and

[12] Ibid, p. 87.

Celtic literature). Chrétien pioneered a literary mode that drew heavily upon existing tales of adventure, whilst encapsulating the ideals, customs, and concerns of twelfth-century courtly society. His romances engage in a complex and often contradictory mix of martial, courtly, and religious influences, an ambiguity that is reflected in the suggestive landscapes and marvellous scenarios that proliferate throughout these tales. Chrétien's incorporation of themes and motifs related to the faerie sign thus forms part of an intentional strategy in which the indeterminacy of the supernatural engages the reader in a process of interpretation with regard to the values and conventions of twelfth-century masculinity.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to identify the way that Chrétien actively engages with the conventions of the faerie sign as part of the construction of an idealised image of chivalric masculinity within his work. Thanks to his influence over future generations of romance writers, Chrétien's works established a precedent for the way that human characters interact with ambiguous otherworldly entities in romance. In particular, his adaptation of supernatural motifs derived from Celtic literature, and used in the service of the heroic quest narrative, helped to cement the close relationship that literary faeries would have with chivalry and personal growth, at least until the beginning of the seventeenth century. This chapter will therefore focus on those of Chrétien's romances that draw most heavily on the *matière de Bretagne* and on Celtic mythological tradition: namely, *Erec et Enide*, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, *Le Chevalier au Lion*, and *Le Conte du Graal*. Despite the absence of explicitly identifiable faerie characters in these works, there are still many instances in which themes and motifs pertaining to the faerie sign can be identified. I will argue that Chrétien's purposeful retention of these otherworldly signifiers effectively serves to heighten our understanding of the protagonists' development toward an idealised image of knighthood. In order to understand this relationship between faeries and chivalry more clearly, we will need

to appreciate the varied and often contradictory approaches to chivalry that existed within the courts of Europe at this time. Accordingly, the next section of this chapter will present a summary of the complex mix of secular, spiritual, and personal aspirations that made up the chivalric ideal.

The chivalric ideal

The transformation of the European warrior elite into the courtly knights of the High to Late Middle Ages began during the ninth and tenth centuries, originating in the Frankish territories of the Carolingian empire, but then gradually spreading out into the rest of Europe. In relation to the specific development of chivalric practices and ideals, the most significant changes appear to have taken place during the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. At this time, a new form of aristocratic court began to emerge: one that drew together knights, artists, and religious clerics in service to a single liege lord or sovereign. During the late twelfth century, the court of Champagne under the rule of Henry the Liberal amassed a large number of knights and clerics (including figures such as Nicholas of Clairvaux and Chrétien de Troyes), allowing for the development of a shared 'courtly' culture.[13] The knights of Henry's court, and of all courts across Europe, were increasingly defined by clerical writers who identified both themselves and knights as belonging to an elite inner circle. Ramon Llull's thirteenth-century *Llibre qui es de l'ordre de cavalleria* (*Book of the Order of Knighthood*), for example,

[13] See Ad Putter, 'Knights and Cleric at the Court of Champagne: Chrétien de Troyes's Romances in Context', in *Medieval Knighthood V*, ed. by Stephen Church and Ruth Harvey (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), pp. 243-66. See also, C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985). On the relationship between the aristocratic court and the values of chivalry, Richard Barber writes that the word 'courtly, *curialis*' emerges around 1060-80, roughly at the same time as the concept of knighthood first begins to appear. Richard Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry*, revised edn. (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), p. 71.

emphasises the importance of knights in relation to their liege lord. He writes, 'Offici de cavayler és mantenir e deffendre senyor terrenal, cor rey, ni príncep, ni nuil alt baró, sens ajuda, no poria mantenir dretura en ses gents' ['The office of a knight is to maintain and defend the worldly lord, for a king [or prince] who has no barons has no power to maintain righteousness in his men without aid and help'].[14]

However, the warrior ethos of Western Christendom was also being shaped by a form of secular piety that placed particular emphasis on the moral and spiritual obligations of fighting men. For many, the knightly classes represented a dangerously powerful and often uncontrollable subsection of society. As such, one of the ways that chivalry developed at this time was under the influence of the Christian church, whose teachings and actions created a new culture of balance where warfare was either sanctioned as part of a divinely-approved just war, or where its sins had to be mitigated through acts of penance.[15]

One way in which this was achieved, or at least attempted, was through the various religious reforms and cultural movements that occurred during the late tenth and eleventh centuries. The Peace of God movement instigated by the Church at the end of the tenth century, for example, called for a reduction in force of arms to settle quarrels or grievances. Included within this edict was the demand that clergy, merchants, peasants, and their respective livelihoods should all be protected from wilful acts of violence enacted by knights.[16] In addition to this, the Truce of God, an edict aimed at restricting the days on which

[14] Ramon Llull, *Llibre de L'Orde de Cavalleria*, ed. by Albert Soler I Llopart (Barcelona: Editorial Barcino, 1988), II, 74-6. The translation used here is a modernised version of William Caxton's 1484 edition: *Ramon Lull's Book of Knighthood and Chivalry & the Anonymous Ordene de Chevalerie*, ed. and trans. by Brian R. Price (Union City, California: The Chivalry Bookshelf, 2001), p. 29.

[15] Raluca L. Radulescu, 'How Christian is Chivalry?', in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England*, pp. 69-83; Maurice Keen, *Nobles, Knights and Men-At-Arms in the Middle Ages* (London: Hambledon Press, 1996), pp. 1-3.

[16] Keen, Ibid.

war could be waged, emphasised the prohibition of violence on religious holidays or days with spiritual significance. Such restrictions were not always upheld and military action was rarely postponed in favour of religious observances (except during sieges, where the rules of engagement made incorporating them less problematic),[17] but the existence of both of these edicts highlights the difficult relationship that fighting men had with the nonviolent ideologies of the Catholic Church (at least when fellow Christians were the targets of such violence).

One way the Church tried to control these violent energies was by channelling them into crusading. The advent of the First Crusade marks a significant development in medieval perceptions of the knightly ideal, with the capture of Jerusalem in 1099 setting the standard for what was to become the highest calling of chivalry for generations to come: the defence of holy places. Indeed, Maurice Keen goes so far as to suggest that crusading 'gave a newly specific religious orientation to the role of knighthood, that helped to put the estate of chivalry on a par with the priesthood in its Christian service'.[18] Writing at the turn of the twelfth century, for example, Guibert de Nogent argues that:

> …instituit nostro tempore praelia sancta Deus, ut ordo equestris [...] novum reperirent salutis promerendae genus, ut nec funditus electa [*f.*, ejecta] (uti fieri assolet) monastica conversatione[.]
>
> …in our own time God has instituted a Holy War, so that the order of knights […] may now seek God's grace in their wonted

[17] Barber, pp. 251-2.

[18] Keen, p. 2.

> habit, and in the discharge of their own office, and no longer need to be drawn to seek salvation by utterly renouncing the world in the profession of a monk.[19]

Similar praise, specifically for the order of Templars, can be found in Bernard of Clairvaux's *De laude novae militiae* (*In Praise of the New Knighthood*), in which he declares those who kill in the name of Christ to be 'non homicidia, sed ut ita dixerim, malicidia' ['not a mankiller, but, if I may so put it, a killer of evil'].[20]

Another treatise on knighthood that is worth mentioning, despite its irregularity (composed by a knight rather than a cleric of the court) and its later date, is Geoffrey de Charny's *Livre de Chevalerie* (*Book of Chivalry*, c.1350s), in which Charny validates knightly pursuits by placing them on a scale that assigns different levels of merit to different martial activities. Charny acknowledges holy war as the ultimate calling of chivalry, but he also theorises that honour could be earned through other deeds as well, such as performing well in jousts and tournaments, or serving in secular wars. He describes ideal knights as those who temper a great desire for heroic deeds with resolve, determination, and inner reflection, conducting themselves with honour at all times:

> Si le font briefment et liement et n'attendent pas que l'en les amonneste, ne que l'en les en avise. Et ainsi semble il* que telx

[19] Guibert de Nogent, *Gesta dei per Francos*, CLVI, 0685C, *Patrologia Latina Database*. Translation taken from Keen, p. 2.

[20] Bernard de Clairvaux, *Œuvres completes, XXXI*, ed. and trans. by Pierre-Yves Emery (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990), 217:13-4. Translation taken from Richard Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 70.

> gens sont faiz et se font d'eulx mesmes, dont se doit doubler le bien qui ainsi en teles gens se met, quant de leur proper movement et bonne volenté que Dieu leur a donnee, il cognoissent le bien; et rien n'espargnent, ne corps ni avoir, qu'il ne mettent peine de le faire.
>
> They do this quickly and gladly, without waiting for admonitions or exhortations. Thus it seems that such men have made a good reputation for themselves through their own efforts; in this way they double the good to be found in them, when from their own instinct and the will for good which God has given them, they know what is right and spare neither themselves nor what they own in their effort to achieve it.[21]

Of particular note here is the emphasis that Charny places on knowing oneself and a combination of grace and inner resolve as the determining factors of idealised knighthood. Richard Kaeuper summarises this dichotomy between religious ideals and secular behaviour particularly well, suggesting that an important part of the success of chivalry as a concept rested on an awkward fusion of prowess and piety. Medieval knights assimilated Christian ideals that were broadly compatible with their worldview and adapted them into an 'aristocratic form of lay piety' that emphasised prowess above all things. In this way, the

[21] Geoffrey de Charny, *The Book of Chivalry*, trans. and ed. by Richard Kaeuper and Elspeth Kennedy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), pp. 100-1. Charny himself went on crusade in 1347, travelling to the eastern Mediterranean in the service of the Dauphin of Vienne (Keen, p. 7).

beliefs of medieval Christianity were merged with a new 'quasi-religion of honour' whose practitioners advocated 'worship of the demigod prowess'.[22]

This idealised image of pious knighthood can be found in accounts of the life of William Marshal, First Earl of Pembroke, a prominent figure in the English court during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Marshal was a keenly religious man who, among other things, went on a pilgrimage to Cologne, founded a religious house, fought in the crusades, and had himself invested into the order of Knights Templar on his deathbed.[23] In *L'Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal* (*The History of William Marshal*), William's biographer tells us that William considered all of his knightly achievements to be a gift from God.[24] However, Marshal was also a central figure in the political machinations of late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century England, serving a total of five English kings (Henry II, Henry the Young King, Richard I, John, and Henry III) during the course of his life. Indeed, his legacy is generally tied to his involvement in the First Barons' War (1215-17) and his role as regent during the early reign of Henry III. Even for the likes of Marshal, then, piety and the militaristic or administrative duties of secular governance were combined into a single knightly ideal.

One reason why these two competing aspects of knighthood were so easy to combine is because, on a practical level, there was very little to distinguish between the duties they required. Wars fought in the name of God were no less politically motivated than other military campaigns, and the realities of the crusades, with their complex mix of religious and political agendas, were a far cry from the religious ideals upon which they were supposedly founded. Identifying war as acceptable within the eyes of God may even have served to

[22] Kaeuper, pp. 47-8.

[23] Ibid, p. 47.

[24] *The History of William Marshal*, ed. by A. J. Holden, 2 Vols., ANTS 4-6 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2004), I, 9285-90; II, 18388-406.

perpetuate many acts of violence, allowing for an interpretation of such acts as admissible within the context of a knight's greater spiritual purpose. As Kaeuper points out, one of the perceived benefits associated with knighthood at this time was an understanding of God's acceptance of the occasional 'slips that mar their moral scorecards'.[25] In effect, then, an orthodox belief in the power of perpetual repentance and forgiveness enabled the continuation of a culture of war across Western Europe.

Despite this continuity between secular and spiritual acts of knighthood, the image of the holy knight was at the forefront of the chivalric ideal for roughly two hundred years, from the beginning of the First Crusade to the fall of the Order of Knights Templar in 1312. Indeed, whilst the perception of holy crusade as the ultimate calling of chivalry gradually deteriorated over the centuries (largely as a result of multiple setbacks in the Levant), crusader culture persisted well into the fourteenth century and beyond.[26] In a secular literary context, however, imaginative depictions of chivalry evolved along slightly different lines, with a far greater emphasis on *fin' amor* (courtly love) as a formative characteristic of the knightly ideal. The concept of *fin' amor* first developed in the courts of southern France as a popular theme of troubadour love poetry (initiated by Guillaume IX of Aquitaine around the year 1100). However, the movement also spread north, making its way into the epic poems of the northern French *trouvères* sometime during the mid-twelfth century. For both the Occitan troubadours and the northern *trouvères*, love and the glorification of amorous passion

[25] Kaeuper, p. 50. See also, Barber, pp. 255-8.

[26] Barber suggests that interest in the crusades remained strong at least until the Papal Schism of 1378, which led to a divide in Western Christendom and an end to the concept of a united Christian Europe striving to overcome external pagan forces (pp. 263-5). Crusades continued to take place after this date, largely in response to the rapidly spreading Ottoman Empire, but on a much smaller scale and with little success.

became central precepts of the courtly ideal, reshaping the way that the Francophone courts of medieval Europe saw themselves.[27]

The earliest romance texts began to appear around the same time as the poetry of the southern troubadours was making its way north. These *romans d'antiquité*, circulated in the courts of England and northern France, focused on stories derived from the epic tales of classical literature (*Le Roman de Thebes*, *Le Roman d'Eneas*, *Le Roman de Troie*) and were characterised by their use of the vernacular, their detailed portraits of heroes and heroines, and their penchant for lengthy monologues emphasising characters' emotional states.[28] For Laurence Harf-Lancner, these texts also exhibited the first signs of romance's intergration of the courtly love topos. She suggests that the author of *Eneas*, for example, places particular emphasis on the hero's relationships with both Dido and Lavine, 'revelling in the depiction of the pangs of awakening passion' in a way that mirrored the love poetry of the *trouvères*.[29]

The blend of heroism and *fin' amor* that began to emerge in the *romans d'antiquité* developed gradually into the tales of courtly adventure that dominated popular imaginative literature for centuries to come. For Richard Barber, this shift in focus marked something of a watershed moment between literary depictions of chivalry and the old warrior ideals that had preceded it. He argues that the female love interest of the romance narrative was 'unlike

[27] Laurence Harf-Lancner, 'Chrétien's Literary Background', trans. by Amy L. Ingram, in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. by Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), 26-42, p. 29. See also Sarah Kay, 'Courts, clerks, and courtly love', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, 81-96, pp. 84-5.

[28] Roberta L. Krueger, 'Chrétien de Troyes and the Invention of Arthurian Courtly Fiction', in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. by Helen Fulton (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009), 160-74, p. 162. Laurence Harf-Lancner talks about the term 'romance' evolving from 'en roman' (i.e., literally a story spoken in a romance language, p. 27).

[29] Harf-Lancner, p. 33.

anything before or since, unrivalled in her command over men's hearts'.[30] As a result, knighthood was no longer exclusively defined by its martial value or by customs of fidelity that bound knights in service to a liege lord. Indeed, as the love between a knight and his lady was frequently expressed in terms that resembled the relationship between vassal and lord, the incompatibility of these conflicting loyalties (both personal and social) became one of the defining themes of romance.

Chrétien and chivalry

It was not until Chrétien de Troyes that romance adopted the imaginative landscapes and scenarios that are commonly associated with the Arthurian quest narrative. Chrétien derived his knowledge of King Arthur primarily from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (the popularity of which brought Arthur to the forefront of medieval European culture during the early twelfth century), and from Wace's *Roman de Brut* (a French adaptation of Monmouth's *Historia*, written for the Plantagenet court in 1155).[31] However, Chrétien adopts a distinctly different approach to these texts' broad historical focus and epic style. Chrétien's romances are distinguished by the imaginative blend of sources that he incorporates into his work, including elements of Breton lore and Celtic myth, classical

[30] Barber, pp. 71-2. Barber's remarks build upon similar arguments made several decades earlier by C. S. Lewis in his *Allegory of Love* (1936). Lewis claimed that the revolutionary nature of the courtly love narrative was so significant that it influenced the production and consumption of imaginative literature for centuries after. Even to the present day, we take love for granted as 'the commonest theme of serious imaginative literature' and yet, for medieval authors prior to the eleventh century (Lewis gives the example of *Beowulf*), this would have seemed alien and unnatural as a narrative focus. C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. 3. It is worth noting that Lewis wrote this appraisal of love in popular culture nearly a century ago, but his argument concerning the widespread appeal of love in the arts seems to be as valid today is it was then.

[31] Krueger, p. 162.

influences taken from Ovid, and the love poetry of the northern French *trouvères* that helped to establish individual, psychological growth as the focal point of the heroic quest narrative. In the opening lines of *Erec et Enide*, Chrétien states his intention to fashion a *bele conjunture* (beautiful composition, 14) from an existing *conte d'aventure* (tale of adventure, 13), adapting a story that he claims had been corrupted and mangled by countless tellers before him. In this way, Chrétien's innovation was to take existing stories and to invest them with meaning pertinent to the courtly culture that surrounded him. By focusing on individuality and self-discovery, Chrétien helped to develop a style of writing that actively promoted debate on social ideals, drawing attention to some of the conflicts and concerns affecting courtly society at that time.[32]

Chrétien's focus was an interest in perceptions of knighthood and the pursuit of an idealised image of youthful masculinity within twelfth-century courtly society.[33] The young men at court held no lands or responsibilities of their own, and so their social worth was largely determined by their ability to gain honour and respect through their deeds (as proposed in Charny's *Livre de Chevalerie*). Accordingly, Chrétien's romances follow a straightforward narrative structure in which knightly protagonists set out from the court in order to prove their worth through acts of heroism. However, the formation of the masculine ideal in Chrétien's work is made more complex by the often conflicting demands that are placed upon the protagonist. Throughout his romances, Chrétien frequently accentuates the different internal and external motivations that act upon an individual, and the challenges that arise from the hero's attempts to balance these demands.

[32] Ibid, p. 163.

[33] Georges Duby, 'Dans la France du Nord-Ouest au XIIe siècle: les "jeunes" dans la société aristocratique', *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, Vol. 19 (1964), pp. 835–46.

In most of Chrétien's romances, this conflict is connected with the incorporation of courtly love poetry into his writing. Indeed, as Robert Hanning argues, the formation of the individual in romance is entirely dependent on the way that a 'self-awareness born of love' interacts and assimilates with the value systems of the male warrior elite.[34] The hero's development throughout the course of the romance is thus dependent on his ability to amalgamate disparate aspects of his persona into a unified whole. He must learn to balance personal desires with his social obligation to seek out honour, and reach a heightened state of maturity in the process. The first three romances explored in this chapter – *Erec et Enide*, *Le Chevalier de la Charrette,* and *Le Chevalier au Lion* – thus draw particular attention to a conflict between love and duty as the prevailing source of tension within their narratives. However, as has been demonstrated above, *fin' amor* and the pursuit of earthly recognition are not the only means by which a knight's worth could be measured in twelfth-century courtly society. A third category, the protagonist's attempt to rise above material values and seek greater spiritual worth, thus forms a central theme in the fourth text covered in this chapter: Chrétien's final romance, *Le Conte du Graal*.

The different texts explored in this chapter indicate Chrétien's awareness that there are multiple ways of thinking about the path of knighthood and where it leads. Indeed, far from presenting a definition that is universally applicable, Chrétien's romances demonstrate that chivalry is perhaps best explained in terms of the various challenges that it poses: challenges that appear to have no obvious answer. Within this context, themes and motifs related to the faerie sign play an important part in shaping the audience's understanding of the complexity of the chivalric ideal. The ambiguous, otherworldly spaces that frequently

[34] Robert W. Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* (London: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 60.

appear in Chrétien's romances intentionally undermine our ability to perceive the 'correct' path that the hero must take. As a result, Chrétien ensures that readerly experience matches the knight's own uncertainty. It is only when the hero overcomes the challenges presented by these otherworldly spaces that his success (or failure) can be determined.

Accordingly, whilst the human world and otherworld are never clearly differentiated, Chrétien's engagement with the themes and motifs of the faerie sign allows him to challenge the ideals of aristocratic society from a position of relative safety. Through an examination of these uncertain otherworldly encounters, this chapter keeps in mind James Wade's argument concerning the ambiguity of faeries and their application as a narrative device used to encourage audience speculation.[35] Chrétien's decision to leave specific characters and places intentionally unclear engages the reader in a process of interpretation regarding the values and conventions of twelfth-century masculinity. In effect, the uncertainty that was already inherent in various contrasting elements of the chivalric ideal becomes increasingly tied to the ambiguity of the otherworldly setting. The protagonists of Chrétien's stories are thus consistently placed in situations where the ambiguous otherworld serves to alienate them from the comparative safety and familiarity of the aristocratic court. As such, they are forced to make difficult decisions about the nature of idealised knighthood in settings that help to develop their autonomy and independence of thought.

[35] Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, pp. 21-6.

Erec and the *Joie de la Cour*

The significant role that faerie-like characters and otherworldly spaces play in the formation of the individual can be seen in a number of Chrétien's texts. However, before focusing on the specific function of certain supernatural encounters, it is necessary to understand the broader themes being explored in each of these romances. In *Erec et Enide*, for example, an emphasis on the protagonist's personal development manifests itself in the form of a conflict between the values of marriage and martial prowess. In the first part of the story, Erec journeys to an unfamiliar town where he meets with Enide and defeats a rival knight as part of a strange annual custom involving a sparrow-hawk. As Jean Frappier has argued, this prelude could exist as a short romance by itself, but instead it functions as a 'springtime overture' to the rest of the story, framing the couple's meeting in a way that emphasises the youthful and idyllic qualities of their love.[36] Whilst Erec has proven himself to be a capable warrior, he remains undeveloped at this stage in the story: he has not yet been faced with a challenge that forces him to change as a person.

The second part of the story begins with Erec and Enide's marriage, and it is here that Chrétien introduces a new conflict into the *conte d'aventure*, exploring Erec's inability to manage his commitments to both knighthood and wedded life. Erec becomes so enthralled by his new wife that he utterly forsakes all knightly deeds in favour of her company. This state of affairs continues until Enide eventually confides in Erec, telling him that she has overheard other nobles questioning his prowess. Realising his error, Erec decides to set off on a quest (accompanied by Enide) in order to reclaim his former glory. The trials that are encountered

[36] Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes*, trans. by Raymond J Cormier (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982), pp. 66-7.

by the couple in this section of the story ultimately serve to renew Erec's martial reputation whilst simultaneously strengthening the bond between both parties. The condition that Erec lays upon Enide at the beginning of their journey – 'Gardez ne parlez ja a moi, / Se je ne vos aresne avant' ['Mind you do not speak to me unless I speak to you first'] (2768-9) – challenges Enide's loyalty and love for Erec by highlighting the difficulty of the decision that is put before her: whether to show her devotion to Erec by obeying his word, or whether she should warn him of the increasingly hostile enemies that they encounter throughout their journey.[37] At the same time, Erec is able to renew Enide's faith in his prowess by overcoming any challenger that they come across. When they flee the court of Oringles de Limors, Erec and Enide have developed (or re-established) a trust that allows Erec to once again place himself entirely at her command ('Tout a vostre commandement', 4920). Enide's presence throughout these various encounters thus serves to emphasise (in a fairly literal sense) Erec's ability to manage his marriage alongside a martial lifestyle. We witness Erec maturing from youthful exuberance and excess toward a more controlled sensibility and, by the story's conclusion, he has resolved the conflicts that existed within himself: combining disparate aspects of his knightly persona into a unified whole.

Erec's final challenge, the *Joie de la Cour* serves to reiterate Erec's success by presenting him with one final obstacle to overcome. Significantly, the *Joie* sequence is also the most overtly supernatural encounter that Erec faces. The passage begins with Guivret le Petit describing the island and castle of Brandigan: a place so well fortified that the massed

[37] For Robert Hanning, this conflict is expressed most clearly during Erec's fight with Guivret le Petit. Hanning states that 'The narrative mode used to express Enide's inner process of decision making is the Ovidian monologue, developed in twelfth-century courtly narratives like the *Roman d'Enéas* and *Narcisus*. Chrétien modifies the function of the monologue here, for Enide is not scrutinizing her thoughts and emotions to see if she loves Erec (as is usually the case with such passage[s] in earlier works), but rather trying to decide whether to show her love on this occasion by obeying or disobeying her husband' (*The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*, p. 69).

forces of France and Britain could not assail it, and so well provisioned that wine, wheat, and fruit are produced in abundance within its walls, along with good supplies of timber and water (5379-406). From the outset, then, we are presented with a superlative example of a medieval fortification: one that hints at the otherworldly, particularly in relation to the seemingly endless bounty that exists within its walls.[38] However, Guivret also warns Erec not to stay there, describing the 'mal trespas' ['evil ritual'] (5414) that has claimed many worthy knights over the past seven years. As with the castles in *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and *Thomas of Erceldoune*, then, this setting is described in terms that emphasise its danger as well as its exemplary qualities.

The sense of otherworldliness surrounding Brandigan is further cultivated by the 'vergier' [kitchen garden/orchard] (5731) in which the *Joie* takes place. Chrétien describes a beautiful garden encircled by an invisible wall that has been crafted with 'nigromance' (5734) to make it look like air but feel as solid as iron. The garden is full of every spice and medicinal plant known to man and it produces fruit all year round, but no fruit grown in the garden can be taken beyond the wall: any person attempting to do so would find themselves trapped inside. The passage can be compared with accounts of mortals entering otherworldly kingdoms in a number of different sources, including in *Immram Brain* and Walter Map's tale of King Herla in *De Nugis Curialium* (both explored in the previous chapter). In both of these examples, the hero and his companions become trapped in the otherworld after eating the food that they find there, and even though the comparison is not exact – Chrétien states that fruit can be consumed within the garden without harm befalling the eater (5740-1) – the motif of a perilous garden of plenty is still heavily implied by Chrétien's description of the *vergier*.

[38] Helaine Newstead suggests that Brandigan may be a composite of the Celtic mythological figure Bran and toponymic place-names that denote ownership (i.e. Ceredigion, 'Ceredig's land'). Newstead, p. 109.

Within the garden, Erec also encounters Mabonagrain, a character who has been largely humanised by Chrétien, but who still exhibits some residual faerie-like characteristics that hint at a former supernatural status in a distant source.[39] For example, Chrétien goes out of his way to draw attention to the unusual height of Mabonagrain:

> Qui mout par ert granz a merveilles;
> Et s'il ne fust granz a ennui,
> Soz ciel n'eüst plus bel de lui.
> Mais il estoit un pié plus granz,
> A tesmoing de totes les genz,
> Que chevaliuers que l'en s'eüst.
>
> (5892-7)

> …he was astonishingly tall; had he not been excessively tall there would have been under heaven none fairer but he was taller by a foot, according to everyone's testimony, than any knight ever known.

Mabonagrain's giant stature and the uncanny nature of the garden (not to mention the cautions and pleas levelled at Erec by Guivret, King Evrain and the people of Brandigan) thus help to emphasise the seemingly insurmountable challenge of the *Joie*. Chrétien intentionally

[39] Duggan suggests that the first part of Mabonagrain's name may be connected to Mabon (also commonly known as 'Gwair' or 'Pryderi'), a well-known figure in Celtic mythology who appears as a captive in a number of Welsh sources including *Preiddeu Annwn* and *Culhwch ac Olwen* (*The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, pp. 216-7).

alerts his audience to the possibility of Mabonagrain's faerie status as a means of enhancing the danger that he represents. Accordingly, Erec's victory through force of arms and his fulfilment of the *Joie* represent the culmination of his heroic endeavours and his greatest martial achievement to date.

However, Chrétien intentionally complicates our understanding of the garden as an otherworldly space through his rationalisation of Mabonagrain and his lady once Erec's victory is complete. We learn, for instance, that Mabonagrain is the nephew of King Evrain (6062), sworn to remain in the garden because of an oath that he made in blind obedience to his lady's will. Furthermore, Mobonagrain's lady is not a malevolent faerie mistress or wicked sorceress of the kind that we find elsewhere in romance (see, for example, Morgan le Fay in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Acrasia in Book II of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*). Rather, she is Enide's cousin, whose only motivation in confining Mabonagrain to the garden is her desire not to lose him (6199-221). Significantly, then, it is not magic that binds Mabonagrain to the otherworldly garden, but his love for the lady and his adherence to a chivalric value system that places honour above all else. Here, Mabonagrain states that

> N'est pas amis qui entresaint
> Tot le bien s'amie ne fait,
> Sanz riens laissier et sans faintise,
> S'il onques puet en nule guise[.]
>
> (6051-4)

> He is no lover who does not unhesitatingly do whatever pleases his lady, unstintingly and neglecting nothing, if ever he can in any way[.]

Mabonagrain is sworn to remain in the garden until a contender arrives who can defeat him, but he is also unwilling to lose on purpose for fear of the shame that it would cause.

> Et je feïsse mesprison,
> Se de rein nule me fainsisse,
> Que trestouz ceus ne conqueïsse
> Envers cui j'eüsse puissance:
> Vilainne fust la delivrance.
>
> (6094).

> And I should have committed a grievous fault in holding back and not defeating all those I could overpower: such a deliverance would have been ignoble.

As a result, he is trapped within the garden, caught in stasis between the two demands that act in conflict upon his person.

Mabonagrain's inability to consolidate these two aspects of his identity perfectly mirrors Erec's earlier struggle to balance love with honour, effectively allowing Erec to overcome a past version of himself. It is this close mirroring of Erec, coupled with the faerie motifs that are associated with both Mabonagrain and the garden, that marks out this

narrative sequence as typical of a faerie encounter. For Mabonagrain, the impossibility of resolving his own personal conflict results in his isolation from King Evrain's court and his relegation to the otherworldly realm of the garden. The supernatural imagery used by Chrétien in the build-up to the *Joie* sequence thus serves primarily to other both Mabonagrain and his lady: they effectively become otherworldly figures through their isolation from the outside world, and it is only through Erec's victory that both characters are able to reveal their human identities and reintegrate themselves into courtly society. At the same time, the defeat of Mabonagrain gives the reader further insight into Chrétien's meaning by resolving the sense of uncertainty that is cultivated through the ambiguous otherworldly garden.

Erec's success in the *Joie* sequence relates directly to his mastery of the conflicting demands of love and honour. Mabonagrain and the otherworldly garden serve as the final proof that Erec has developed toward a greater autonomy and understanding of himself. Indeed, as Sweeney has argued, 'His ability to stand firm in the face of what is clearly a dangerous and magical undertaking, serves as evidence of Erec's evolution from a knight who relied on his wife's beauty to bring him status, into a knight whose courage and fearlessness bring him the ultimate honour of kingship'.[40] As such, Chrétien's engagement with otherworldly imagery differs from those examples explored in the previous chapter in that it is more closely focused on individual growth. In this romance, Mabonagrain effectively becomes a faerie character and an arbiter of chivalric action, testing Erec's ability to navigate conflicting personal and social demands by embodying the contradictions that already exist within him.

[40] Sweeney, p. 89.

Lancelot and the *Pont de l'Espee*

A similar conflict concerning the difficulty of practicing *fin' amor* whilst also demonstrating martial prowess can be found in *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*. However, in this instance, the relationship that Chrétien chooses to depict (at the behest of his patron Marie de Champagne) is one of adulterous love.[41] Here, the story centres on Guinevere's kidnapping by Meleagant, prince of the neighbouring kingdom of Gorre, and the trials that Lancelot must endure as he seeks to rescue and avenge her. However, unlike in *Erec et Enide*, no revelation or moment of self-discovery is reached by the end of Lancelot's quest. Instead, Lancelot is frequently depicted by Chrétien in terms that emphasise his ridiculousness on account of his infatuation. This is demonstrated most strikingly during an early scene in which Lancelot is presented with a choice. In order to rescue Guinevere, he must climb into a cart intended for transporting criminals (321-35). Lancelot hesitates for just two steps before jumping into the cart, thus earning himself the shameful moniker *le chevalier de la charrette*. By foregrounding this moment so early in the romance, Chrétien establishes one of the central questions posed by the story: how does Lancelot's adulterous love for Guinevere affect his ability to act honourably? [42]

[41] Much has been said on the subject of whether Chrétien approved of the *matiere* and *san* of *Lancelot*. The origin of this argument lies in Gaston Paris' 1883 article in which he suggests that Lancelot and Guinevere's love affair was included entirely at the behest of Marie de Champagne. See Gaston Paris, 'Études sur les romans de la Table Ronde : Lancelot du Lac, II', *Romania*, Vol. 12, 48 (1883), pp. 459-534. However, as Jean Frappier has argued, it is perhaps more important to recognise Chrétien's masterful engagement with the *matière* and *san* of the text and the attention to detail that he invests in the telling (pp. 93-4). See also, Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, '*Le Chevalier de la Charrette*', in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, 137-55, pp. 140-1.

[42] Other examples include Lancelot almost falling out of a window at the sight of Guinevere (560-74), being knocked from his saddle into a stream because he is too consumed by his emotions (712-86), and fighting with his back to his opponent in order to keep looking at his beloved (3669-78).

This difficult relationship between love and honour is further explored during the tournament scene where Lancelot must fight badly in order to prove himself to Guinevere (5636-62). Here, Lancelot's ability to seek honour through martial prowess is impeded by Guinevere's command that he must be 'au noauz' [at his worst] (5645) on the tournament field. Whilst Lancelot is eventually permitted to do his best and to prove his worth once more, the passage highlights Lancelot's readiness to act entirely at Guinevere's behest and to forgo honour in service to her love. Unlike Erec's, Lancelot's story does not conclude with the successful integration of competing aspects of his knightly persona. Instead, his devotion to Guinevere leaves him unable to develop further as an individual. By the tale's conclusion, we leave Lancelot in exactly the same state as we found him, inhabiting the role of an adulterous lover on the fringes of courtly society.

The faerie-like characters and spaces that appear throughout the text help to emphasise Lancelot's virtues and his failings by mirroring conventions of Arthurian society in an ambiguous otherworldly setting. This is most clearly demonstrated in the kingdom of Gorre, which recalls examples of otherworlds found throughout romance and in Classical and Celtic traditions. Indeed, this location exhibits a number of motifs associated with the faerie sign that suggest its potential otherworldliness. Amongst these indicators is the description of Gorre as a land 'Don nus estranges ne retorne' ['from which no foreigner returns'] (641), hinting at its possible origin as a mythical land of the dead.[43] Chrétien also tells us of the 'Ponz Evages' ['Underwater Bridge'] (656) that serves as one of the entrances to Gorre.[44] However,

[43] Barbara Newman, for instance, refers to the Classical resonances of Gorre, with particular emphasis on the Styx-like nature of its defensive river and the similarity of Guinevere's kidnap to the stories of Persephone or Eurydice. *Medieval Crossover* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), p. 58. For Duggan, however, Gorre is more closely linked to Celtic and Breton traditions concerning a realm of the dead (p. 230).

[44] Critics such as Laura Hibbard, Helaine Newstead, and Roger Sherman Loomis have drawn attention to the connection between this bridge in Gorre and subaqueous worlds in Irish mythological tradition. See Laura

the most striking image alluded to in reference to Gorre is the Sword Bridge that Lancelot must cross on all fours in order to gain access to King Bademagu's castle.

> D'une espee forbie et blanche
> Estoit li ponz sor l'eve froide,
> Mes l'espee estoit forz et roide
> Et avoit .II. lances de lonc.
> De chasque part ot un grant tronc,
> Ou l'espee estoit closfichiee.
>
> (3022-7)

> The bridge across the cold waters was a sharp and gleaming sword – but the sword was strong and stiff and as long as two lances. On either side were large tree-stumps into which the sword was fixed.

Bridges have a long history of association with the otherworld. Alison Morgan, for instance, cites bridges as one of many motifs that are commonly used in vision literature from the Early Middle Ages to symbolise an otherworldly crossing. She argues that the tradition of associating bridges with passage into the otherworld in Christian literature – dating back as far as Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* – may help to explain why similar bridge crossings are

Hibbard, 'The Sword Bridge of Chrétien de Troyes and its Celtic Original', *Romanic Review*, Vol. 4, 2 (1913), pp. 166-90; Newstead, pp. 140-2; Loomis, *Arthurian Tradition*, pp. 222-3.

associated with supernatural peril in romance.[45] We might also argue that the Sword Bridge relates to the conventions of the faerie sign through its blend of both natural and unnatural imagery. It is certainly unlike any other bridge ('de toz autres divers', 3018) and yet the sword (a weapon of status) and the function of the bridge as a means of crossing a body of water are familiar images for both Lancelot and Chrétien's audience. Its peculiarity thus hints at its otherworldly status and establishes the existence of a boundary between the otherworldly kingdom of Gorre and Arthur's Logres. By crossing that boundary, Lancelot must necessarily distance himself from the familiar world of Arthur's court.

The bridge also serves as a seemingly insurmountable challenge for Lancelot that demonstrates the extent of his love for Guinevere and the lengths to which he will go in her service. Lancelot is in great pain and distress whilst crossing the bridge and cuts himself many times on his hands, knees, and feet in the process. However, the suffering that he experiences is described in a way that suggests a willing mortification of the flesh: 'Mes tot le rasoage et sainne / Amors qui le conduist et mainne, / Si li estoit a sofrir dolz' ['But Love, who guided him, comforted and healed him at once and turned his suffering to pleasure'] (3113-5). The extreme nature of the bridge places emphasis on the danger presented by Gorre, but it also draws attention to Lancelot's determination when faced with a task that his companions believe to be impossible (3056-9). As with the *Joie* episode in *Erec et Enide*, the otherworldly bridge emphasises the internal, psychological conflict that is already afflicting the protagonist. In effect, the danger of the bridge mirrors the danger that Lancelot likewise faces in pursuit of an adulterous relationship with the queen.

[45]Alison Morgan, *Dante and the Medieval Other World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 33-7. See also, Peter Dinzelbacher, *Die Jenseitsbrucke im Mittelalter* (Vienna: Verband der wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaften Osterreichs, 1973).

In a similar vein, the two main characters that we encounter in Gorre (Bademagu and Meleagant) serve to mirror positive and negative qualities of medieval aristocracy in much the same way as Mabonagrain reflected Erec's internal struggle between marriage and prowess. This is made particularly apparent in relation to the extremes of knightly behaviour that each character embodies. Bademagu, for example, adheres to virtues that reflect elements of the seven corporal works of mercy.[46] He is charitable and generous in his treatment of prisoners; he is a hospitable host; and he offers to heal Lancelot's wounds and to kit him out with fresh armour, despite Lancelot's opponent being his own son (3358-61).[47] Chrétien tells us that Bademagu esteems and practices 'lëauté' [loyalty] (3146) above all other virtues. As such, he represents a superlative example of nobility: a figure who embodies an ideal image of kingship, even more so than King Arthur who remains conspicuously side-lined throughout much of the story.

Meleagant, on the other hand, closely mirrors Lancelot's physical strength, his aggression, and his skill as a warrior – he is described as 'Uns chevaliers molt forz et granz' ['a huge and mighty knight'] (638) – but he lacks any of the noble and generous qualities that are demonstrated by his father. He kidnaps Guinevere; he refuses to abide by martial codes of honour (in one instance, he continues to strike Lancelot even after his father has called an

[46] The corporal works of mercy, intended to aid in the relief of bodily distress, are as follows: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome strangers, clothe the naked, visit the sick, visit prisoners, and bury the dead. These acts were derived from the *Book of Matthew* (25: 31-46) and the *Book of Tobit* (1:17-9) and featured frequently in medieval art from the twelfth century onward. See David Griffith, 'The Seven Works of Mercy in the parish church.', in *Patrons and Professionals in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Paul Binski and Elizabeth A. New (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2012), pp. 292–315.

[47] That Guinevere is imprisoned in Bademagu's castle in the first place would seem to contradict interpretations of Bademagu as wholly virtuous. However, it has been argued that the imprisonment of Guinevere and the people of Logres may derive from an older version of the story in which Gorre was a more overtly otherworldly setting. For Loomis, Bademagu's origin may be similar to that of King Evrain in *Erec et Enide*, thus associating him with Celtic mythological traditions concerning Bran son of Llyr, the giant king of the Island of the Mighty (pp. 240-1).

end to their battle, 3813-7); he imprisons Lancelot; and he lies to Arthur's court. Even Bademagu denounces his own son, declaring that Meleagant's heart is 'sanz pitié' ['without mercy'] (6314). Meleagant, therefore, is entirely ruled by his own self-interest: he represents a version of knighthood that is unbounded by the values and regulations placed upon it by society. As such, the two central characters that we encounter within the otherworldly realm of Gorre function as polarising extremes of courtly masculinity: one driven by an ideal of knighthood that is entirely defined by social convention (even to the point of favouring that ideal over his own bloodline), the other by personal desires that cause him to ignore the socially prescribed values and duties of a knight. Lancelot's engagement with both characters shows him to be a figure caught somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. He is still able to carry out knightly duties, as demonstrated by the acts of courage and mercy that he performs throughout the romance, but he is also consumed by his own desires to such an extent that he frequently acts recklessly and without concern for his reputation or wellbeing.

In the context of the faerie sign, then, the otherworldly kingdom of Gorre and its faerie-like inhabitants serve to emphasise the conflicting elements of Lancelot's character. Indeed, Chrétien even introduces a third conflict within Gorre in relation to Lancelot's pseudo-religious devotion to Guinevere. It is here, after all, that Lancelot and Guinevere first consummate their love, and the imagery employed by Chrétien in these scenes frequently implies a misplaced religious fervour. For example, whilst crossing the Sword Bridge, Lancelot receives wounds in his hands and feet akin to stigmata, hinting at the Christ-like suffering that he must undergo in service to Guinevere.[48] Similarly, Lancelot treats Guinevere with a holy

[48] Arguments that highlight Lancelot's connection with Christ and the Resurrection (such as his ability to lift his own tombstone, 1910-4) date back as far as D. D. R. Owen's, 'Profanity and its Purpose in Chrétien's *Cligés* and *Lancelot*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 6, 1 (1970), pp. 37-48. See also, Duggan, p. 229.

reverence akin to saint worship. He bows before her bedchamber as if it were an altar ('Con s'il fust devant un autel', 4718), and Chrétien describes Guinevere's power over Lancelot as greater than any holy relic (4653). For Lancelot, leaving the queen's bed effectively becomes a martyrdom ('Au levir fu il droiz martirs', 4689), for which he suffers a martyr's agony ('il i suefre grant martire', 4691). Thus, in addition to the existing conflict between individual desire and social obligation, Chrétien also implies that Lancelot's adulterous love for the queen is preventing his pursuit of a more pious form of knighthood.[49]

In contrast to the *Joie* episode in *Erec*, then, Lancelot's otherworldly episode does not aid in demonstrating his mastery over the competing ideals of knighthood. He is certainly a very capable knight in many respects, but the conflicts that exist within his character are never fully resolved.[50] Unlike Chrétien's other (completed) romances – *Erec et Enide*, *Cligés*, and *Le Chavlier au Lion* – there is no conclusion in which material reward in the form of lands or titles are bestowed on Lancelot as a marker of his success. We are also left in some doubt as to whether Lancelot is a figure we should condemn or sympathise with. Whilst his loyalty to Guinevere may be misguided, it is still a form of loyalty that is granted some recognition within the poem. In comparison to the *Joie* sequence, themes and motifs associated with the faerie sign are used here to establish a degree of uncertainty and tension surrounding the difficult choices that Lancelot is required to make during his adventure. In this instance, however, the uncertainty remains, and no clear indication is given as to whether Lancelot has chosen the 'right' path.

[49] As in later versions of the Grail legend, Lancelot's love prevents him from achieving a heightened spiritual awareness. See, for example, Thomas Malory's *Morte DArthur*, ed. by Stephen H. A. Shepherd (London: Norton, 2004), p. 533, 12-15.

[50] One way of interpreting this may be that that the two authors of this romance – Chrétien de Troyes and Godefroi de Lagny (who takes over from Chrétien at around line 6132) – were unwilling, as clerical writers, to reward Lancelot for his adulterous love affair.

Yvain and the castle of *Pesme Aventure*

In *Le Chevalier au Lion*, Chrétien returns to the conflict between marriage and prowess previously explored in *Erec et Enide*. Whilst Erec's main failing appears to be his neglect of knightly duties in favour of marital pleasures, Yvain represents the reverse of this imbalance. Accordingly, the first half of the romance draws attention to Yvain's youthful exuberance and the lack of control he exhibits over his aggressive tendencies. At the beginning of the story, Yvain is so eager to reach the magical spring near the forest of Brocéliande that he refuses to wait for Arthur and his retinue to arrive a fortnight later (675-7). He likewise demonstrates very little forethought during his fight with the spring's guardian, exhibiting a lack of restraint and mercy throughout the encounter. Chrétien tells us that 'Et maintenant k'il s'entrevirent, / S'entrevinrent et sanlant firent / Qu'il s'entrehaïssent de mort' ['As soon as the two knights caught sight of one another, they clashed as if they bore each other mortal hatred'] (813-5), and when Yvain strikes the winning blow, he puts so much force into his swing that blood and brains pour out of his opponent's head (862-70). Even then, Yvain is so determined to capture the wounded knight (who is somehow still able to flee the battlefield) that he pursues the knight back to his castle and subsequently becomes trapped in its portcullis. It is only as a result of this imprisonment that Yvain becomes aware of the damage that he has caused to the castle's inhabitants by killing the guardian of the spring.[51]

[51] For Hanning, a similar example of the aggressive impulses of knighthood can be seen in the battle between Erec and Guivret le Petit. Hanning suggests that the description of Guivret's bold and unthinking hostility toward Erec on their first encounter perfectly embodies the unchecked violence that Erec must also strive to overcome in himself if he is to achieve control over his own destiny (pp. 78-9).

The second part of Yvain's story begins with his marriage to Laudine and an agreement that he will return to her in one year after travelling with Gauvain to seek renown in the tournaments of Britain. At this stage, Yvain is still primarily concerned with his reputation – he wants to compete 'Quë on ne m'apiaut recreant' ['lest he be called a coward'] (2561) – and so when the year passes and he has forgotten his promise to Laudine, she sends a messenger to tell Yvain that she has renounced him (reclaiming the magical ring that she had gifted him in the process). The remainder of Yvain's story follows his various exploits, helping women in need wherever he can, as he attempts to repent of his broken promise. Yvain, through the help of Lunete, eventually manages to trick Laudine into forgiving him, but the romance concludes on an uncertain note. Yvain appears to have learnt some level of restraint in his pursuit of knightly deeds, but the way that the reunion is achieved offers little certainty about the prospects for their future happiness.[52]

Yvain's development throughout the course of the romance is marked by a number of supernatural and otherworldly encounters, from the grotesque giant who watches over the beasts near the forest of Brocéliande, to the spring that can summon storms, to Laudine's magic ring that keeps the wearer from imprisonment and harm, to the lion that accompanies and assists Yvain throughout the second half of the romance. In addition to this, there are a number of locations in *Yvain* that exhibit a certain ambiguity in relation to their status as faerie otherworlds. Laudine's castle, for example, is not explicitly supernatural, but it is surrounded by signs of its potential otherworldliness, including its isolated location on the borders of Brocéliande forest (186-9), its connection to the magical spring (378-83, 1614—8), and its unfamiliarity to Arthur and his court, despite only being a few days ride from Carlisle (694,

[52] Frappier, p. 110.

1821). The location that best exemplifies this ambiguity, however, is the castle of *Pesme Aventure*. From the outset, the castle is established as a place of foreboding and menace. The crowds who gather in the town try to dissuade Yvain from entering the castle by jeering and insulting him, too afraid to warn the knight about what awaits inside (5115-70).[53] However, rather than mortal peril, the suggested outcome is that Yvain will receive 'grant honte' ['great shame'] (5169) within the castle walls.[54] As with the examples in *Erec* and *Lancelot*, this is a trial that is as much about identity and the balancing of ideals as about strength of arms.

Within the castle, Yvain encounters three hundred maidens weaving fine silks in an enclosed meadow (5189-207). For many critics, these maidens represent an example of Chrétien's tendency toward rationalisation and realism in his romances. Evidence for this argument is generally derived from a detailed account, provided by one of the weavers, describing the poor wages and living conditions that they are forced to endure (5296-333).[55] However, they also come from the Isle of Maidens ('Ille as Pucheles', 5253), a name that shares some obvious parallels with the otherworldly Island of Women found in *Immram*

[53] An interesting class distinction is made here between the foolish, vulgar people who inhabit the town – Yvain refers to them as 'vilaine' (5115), drawing specific attention to their lowly status – and Yvain himself, who is a knight of King Arthur's court and therefore shows no fear when approaching the castle.

[54] Shame and death are not necessarily unrelated in deeds of knightly valour, but the implication here certainly seems to be that Yvain will at least return from the castle alive: 'Et nepourquant grant joie aroie / Se je de layens vous veoie / Sans trop grant honte revenir' ['However, I would be very happy to see you come back out without having suffered too great shame within'] (5167-9).

[55] Various attempts to interpret this scene as an authentic depiction of silk-workers' conditions in the twelfth century have been put forward. Robert Hall, for example, has argued that the weavers might represent Christian slave girls working in Muslim silk factories in the East. Robert A. Hall 'The Silk Factory in Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*', *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 56, 6 (1941), pp. 418-22. Likewise, Jean Frappier describes this episode as reflecting the poor conditions that Chrétien may have observed in the workshops of Champagne (p. 116). Recent criticism, on the other hand, has tended to avoid pinpointing Chrétien's source of inspiration for the weavers. See Michelle Sweeney, p. 96, and Tony Hunt, '*Le Chevalier au Lion*: Yvain Lionheart', in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, 156-68, p. 161, both of whom draw attention to the scene's social realism as a means of emphasising the importance of the choices that Yvain must make at this stage of his journey.

Brain.[56] Furthermore, the weaver tells Yvain that the castle is ruled by '.ii. fix de dyable […] de femme et de netun furent' ['two sons of the Devil […] born of a woman and a demon]' (5267-9).[57] The tribute of maidens sent to these two demonic figures shows some clear parallels to the faerie tribute demanded by the devil in the later *Thomas of Erceldoune* (289-92). Significantly, then, at the moment when Chrétien appears to be most invested in the realities of twelfth-century life, he is simultaneously distancing his audience from that reality by cultivating a sense of the uncanny. Once again, he is intentionally blurring the boundary between the natural and the supernatural by hinting at the potential faerie status of the three hundred maiden's that appear in this scene.

The test that Yvain must face in the castle of *Pesme Aventure* is to defeat the two demon knights in combat. However, in addition to this, Yvain's resolve to seek no remuneration for his services is also being put to the test. In establishing the challenge that the castle represents to Yvain, Chrétien draws particular attention to the rewards that Yvain might gain through victory. The knight who can defeat the two half-demons stands to inherit the town and surrounding lands, as well as the Lord's daughter, whom Yvain believes to be so beautiful and well-mannered as to be worthy of the Holy Roman Emperor (5478-9). However, Yvain has learnt to temper the brash, glory-seeking side of his personality that drove him to seek adventure at the magical spring and to abandon his promise to Laudine.[58] He refuses to

[56] Loomis argues that the annual tribute of thirty maidens from the *Ille as Pucheles* ultimately derives from Irish sources. He suggests that a close analogy can be drawn between this example and a similar tribute motif in the Tristan romances that is connected to a legend found in *Tochmarc Emire*. The legend concerns a tribute of sons and daughters levied on the people of Ireland by a supernatural race known as the Fomorians (*Arthurian Tradition*, pp. 325-6).

[57] The word 'netun' derives from the Latin *Neptunus* (i.e. Neptune): a semantic shift resulting from the reconceptualization and demonization of the Classical deity within a medieval Christian context. Variations of this word include *nuiton* and *luiton*, the latter of which is linked to the modern French *lutin*, meaning goblin or pixie. See *Chrétien de Troyes: Romans*, p. 885, n. 1.

[58] Sweeney, p. 91.

accept the rewards being offered to him and only agrees to fight with the two half-demons when he is told that he has no other option. In order to mitigate his host's anger, he also swears an oath to return to the castle and to marry the Lord's daughter if his purpose allows (5741-51). Whilst this tactical appeasement does not entirely placate the Lord, it does ensure that Yvain is able to walk free. The measured, diplomatic approach adopted by Yvain thus demonstrates a degree of autonomy that he did not possess whilst imprisoned in Laudine's castle, where he required the assistance of a magical ring and the persuasive abilities of Lunete to ensure his survival. As such, the passage draws attention to Yvain's heightened maturity at this later stage in the story.

Here, as in *Erec* and *Lancelot*, then, the uncertainty and tension that is generated by the ambiguous otherworldly castle serve to foreground the difficult choices that Yvain must make in relation to his pursuit of a knightly ideal.[59] Yvain's actions in the castle of *Pesme Aventure* demonstrate his ability to balance martial prowess with temperance, charity, and courtesy: amalgamating disparate aspects of the knightly ideal into a unified persona. Within this context, the three hundred maidens and their demonic overlords effectively serve as a means of signalling to the audience that Yvain is being tested. The inhabitants of the castle reflect the customs and conventions of medieval society in many respects (for example, in relation to the description of silk weaving), but the themes and motifs that connect this passage to conventions of the faerie sign also help to destabilise audience expectations and to cast doubt on the outcome of the encounter.

[59] As Sweeney suggests, 'This moment in the text is not about magic, the wonders of nature, or God, but about the reality of man's choices' (p. 97).

Perceval and the *Roi Pescheor*

Chrétien's final (incomplete) romance, *Le Conte du Graal*, tells the story of a young, inexperienced boy developing into one of the greatest knights of Arthur's court. However, the conflict between *fin' amor* and martial prowess that defines much of Chrétien's other work is replaced here by a heightened emphasis on the spiritual journey of the protagonist.[60] At the beginning of the romance, Perceval mistakes knights for angels (353-68) and has never set foot inside a church before (537). His ignorance of God is matched only by his unfamiliarity with the world outside of his forest home, and he sets off carelessly on a quest to become a knight, leaving his mother to faint with grief at his departure (584-9).

Perceval soon learns how to become an accomplished warrior through the teachings of Gornemant de Goort and subsequently wins the love of the maiden Blanchefleur by lifting the siege around her castle. However, this is where Chrétien subverts the expectations established by his earlier romances. Perceval refuses the offer of lands and marriage made to him by Blanchefleur and instead sets off in search of his mother to amend for his earlier abandonment of her (2857-72): an indicator that he is beginning to mature as an individual.

Whilst searching for his mother, Perceval comes to the castle of the Fisher King where he witnesses a strange grail procession that passes through its halls. He is curious about the procession, but he says nothing to his host. When he later returns to King Arthur's court, a hideous damsel appears and tells him that he has caused great suffering through his inaction (4570-613). Once again, he determines to amend his past wrongs, and so he embarks on a

[60] Roberta Krueger suggests that *Le Conte du Graal* recounts Perceval's 'evolution from a naive simpleton, impetuous and rude; to an accomplished knight, who protects Blanchefleur and avenges the laughing damsel; and finally to a penitent Christian knight' (p. 172).

quest to rediscover the Fisher King's castle and to learn the meaning of the grail procession. However, at this point, the story of *Graal* is split in two and half of the romance follows Gauvain's quest to lift the siege of Mont Esclaire (4636-50). Perceval's adventure to rediscover the grail is only alluded to once more before the romance comes to an abrupt end.[61] In Perceval's final scene, he encounters a hermit who tells him of the sin that he committed in abandoning his mother and describes the penance that he must do in order to redeem himself (6316-98). Chrétien thus appears to be drawing attention to a new stage in Perceval's development as a character, one that is centred around an increasing spiritual awareness.[62]

As in the previous examples explored in this chapter, then, Perceval's process of self-discovery is identified in part through the challenges that he encounters when interacting with the faerie sign: demonstrated most clearly in this case through the Fisher King's castle. The first indication that we have of the castle's otherworldliness is Perceval's isolation from society and his proximity to liminal wilderness settings. Perceval rides out from the castle of Biaurepaire and arrives at the banks of a deep, fast flowing river which he is unable to cross. Riding along its banks, he eventually comes to a large boulder blocking his path and, beside it, two men fishing in a small boat. One of the men tells Perceval that there is no way to cross the river and offers him lodgings at his home, directing him up through a 'frete / Qui es ten cele roche fete' ['cleft cut into the rock'] (2967-8) toward a forested valley. The rock, in particular, seems to imply a boundary crossing similar to that found in the later *Sir Orfeo*: the 'roche' through which the faerie king's kingdom is accessed (349). Chrétien's description of

[61] According to Gerbert de Montreuil, author of the third continuation to *Le Conte du Graal*, Chrétien died before he was able to finish writing his final romance. See *The Complete Story of the Grail*, trans. by Nigel Bryant (Cambridge: Brewer, 2015), p. 394.

[62] Donald Maddox has argued that the nature of Perceval's failure at the Fisher King's castle is related to his inability to recognise the internal, rather than the external, significance of the grail. Donald Maddox, *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 94-100.

the cleft thus signals more than just the difficult terrain that Perceval is travelling through. Rather, its inclusion draws attention to a boundary between the known and the unknown, alerting the audience to the potential dangers that lay ahead.

The castle itself, similar to those found in *Erec*, *Lancelot*, and *Yvain*, is isolated from the rest of society. However, unlike the invisible wall of Brandigan, the Sword Bridge of Gorre, or the demons of *Pesme Aventure*, there are no overt supernatural signifiers in this instance. Instead, Chrétien relies on superlatives to cultivate a sense of uncertainty about the nature of the setting. For example, he describes the great hall of the castle with a fire at its centre so large that 'Bien I poïst .IIIIC. homes / Aseoir dejoste lo feu, / Chacuns aüst et aise et leu' ['Four hundred men could easily sit around that fire, and each would have a comfortable spot'] (3034-6).[63] There is also a broad feasting table made of a single piece of ivory (3199-201), a table cloth that is whiter than any linen possessed by the wealthiest members of the Church (3216-7), and a sword made of such high quality steel 'Que ja ne porroit depecier / Fors que par un tot sol peril / Que nus ne savoit fors que [c]il / Qui l'avoit forgiee et tempree' ['that it could not be broken except in one singularly perilous circumstance known only to him who had forged and tempered it'] (3078-81).[64] In each of these examples, no specific reference is made to marvels or the supernatural, but the excess, splendour, and strangeness of many of these objects help to raise questions about the exact nature of the castle and its inhabitants.

[63] Loomis suggests that the interior of the hall must have seemed strange to audiences familiar with castles built in the Romanesque style (as was typical for twelfth-century Champagne). He argues that the layout is instead reminiscent of early medieval Irish feasting halls and, specifically, the royal hall of Connaught at Cruachan (*Arthurian Tradition*, p. 375).

[64] Chrétien also gives us a lengthy description of the food being served in the castle, including many eastern fruits and spices such as dates, figs, nutmeg, cloves, pomegranates, and Alexandrian gingerbread (3263-6). Whilst such delicacies would have been available to those able to afford them in the courts of Champagne – see Paul Freedman and Nancy Ovedovitz, *Out of the East* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 24 – they also lend this scene an enhanced exoticism (drawing specific attention to the frequent placement of the otherworld in the east by medieval writers and cartographers) that further grounds the encounter in the uncanny.

The clearest indicator of the castle's otherworldliness occurs when Perceval awakes the next morning. He finds the castle completely deserted and so he dresses himself and rides out through the gate, which appears to close magically behind him (3340-7). After a short ride, he comes across a maiden weeping over a dead knight in a forest who tells him that 'Cinquantes liues an cest san / Tot droit, ensin con vos venez, C'uns osteus n'I seroit trovez / Qui fust leiaus ne bon ne sains' ['one could ride for twenty-five leagues in the direction from which you have come without finding a good, honest, and proper lodging place'] (3408-11). Perceval tells the maiden (who reveals herself to be his cousin) that the place where he spent the night is within shouting distance of where they stand, prompting her to declare 'Ha! sire, ou geüstes vos donques? / Chiés lo riche Roi Pesheor?' ['Ah, my Lord! Did you sleep then in the castle of the noble Fisher King?'] (3432-3).

The Fisher King himself shows some potential signs of otherworldliness. There are no indications of this in terms of his appearance or any overt supernatural ability, but our first encounter with this character – sat with another man in a fishing boat that is anchored in the middle of a river (2932-44) – along with his initial interaction with Perceval suggests that he may have some ties to river guardian figures similar to (although less combative than) the one that Lancelot encounters in *Le Chevailer de la Charrette* (712-86).

> Cil qui ne set que faire puise
> Ne en quell leu pasaige truise
> Les salue et demande lor:
> "Ensaigniez moi, por Dé, seignor,
> S'an ceste eve a [ne] nef ne pont."
> Et cil qui pesche li respont:

“Nenil, frere, a[n la] moie foi,

Ne n’i a nef, si con je croi,

Plus grant de cesti o nos somes,

Qui ne porteroit pas .V. homes,

Vint leues amont ne aval

Si n’I puet en passer cheval,

Qu’il n’i a bac ne pont ne gué.

(2949-61)

The knight [Perceval], not knowing what to do or how to cross, greeted them an inquired: “Tell me, my lords, if there is a ford or bridge across this river.” And the one who was fishing replied: “Not at all, brother, upon my word; nor is there a boat, I assure you, larger than the one we’re in, which would not hold five men. There is no way to get a horse across, for there’s no ferry, bridge, or ford”.

We do not know the fisherman’s identity at this point in the story, and the advice itself appears legitimate, but the outcome of this meeting (Perceval’s journey to the otherworldly castle) and the fisherman’s suggestion that Perceval will find lodgings there along with ‘something else you have need of’ (‘De ce et d’el / Avreiez vos mestier’, 2964-5) indicates that this encounter is more than just happenstance. The Fisher King’s apparent prophetic ability is further demonstrated when he later gifts a sword (described above) to Perceval, declaring ‘Biaux sire, ceste espee / Vos fu jugiee et destinee’ [‘Good brother, this sword was ordained

and destined for you'] (3105-6). However, even without these words, the act of gifting a seemingly magical item establishes a connection between the Fisher King and the conventions of the faerie sign, just as it does for Laudine in *Le Chevalier au Lion*.

This ambiguity surrounding both the castle and the Fisher King is further enhanced by the introduction of the grail procession that passes through the great hall. During this scene, Perceval witnesses a squire carrying a white lance with a bleeding tip, followed by two handsome squires holding golden candelabras, a beautiful and richly attired maiden carrying a golden grail set with many precious stones, and another maiden carrying a silver carving platter (3128-77).

Critics have long drawn attention to the different Christian and Celtic influences that appear to be at play in this scene. On the one hand, the procession has been understood as a piece of Christian liturgy due to the single consecrated host ('sole hoiste', 6348) that is carried by the grail. Building on this one piece of evidence, comparisons have been drawn to both Catholic and Eastern Orthodox processional artefacts (such as the chalice and paten used for Holy Communion and Extreme Unction), as well as the possible connection that can be made between the bleeding lance and the lance of Longinus (used to pierce Christ's side on the cross).[65] However, the grail has also been compared to vessels of plenty that appear throughout Celtic literary tradition, such as Dagda's Cauldron, or the hamper of Gwyddneu

[65] See, for example, Rose J. Peebles, *The Legend of Longinus in Ecclesiastical Tradition and in English Literature and Its Connection with the Grail* (Baltimore: J. H. Furst, 1911); Konrad Burdach, *Der Gral* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1938); Alexandre Micha, *La tradition manuscrite des romans de Chrétien de* Troyes (Paris: Droz, 1939). As Jean Frappier and Joseph Duggan have argued, these theories frequently fail to explain many of the details of the grail procession that do not fit into a strictly liturgical definition of its function, such as the lack of religious gestures in the scene, the presence of women in the procession, or why the lance is actively bleeding rather than merely covered in blood. Jean Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes et le mythe du graal* (Paris: Société d'Edition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1972), p. 169; Duggan, pp. 240-2.

Garanhir in *Culhwch ac Olwen*.[66] Similarly, a bleeding lance features in a number Welsh and Irish tales where it is commonly associated with the fertility of the land and its sovereign.[67]

In light of this, the blending of Christian and Celtic symbolism within the grail sequence is perhaps best explained as another intentional attempt by Chrétien to obscure our efforts to rationalise this passage or to assign it a specific meaning or function. At the moment when Perceval first encounters the grail, he is still too frightened to deviate from the codes of conduct that have been instilled in him by Gornemant earlier in the romance.[68] The uncertainty surrounding the grail thus effectively mirrors Perceval's own uncertainty and lack of conviction concerning his identity. He is unable to discover the grail's true meaning because he has yet to achieve mastery of himself. Indeed, he doesn't even learn his own name until after he has left the Fisher King's castle (3511-3). It is only by developing his autonomy and sense of self that Perceval can progress toward the spiritual awareness that is hinted at in his final scene.

For Jean Frappier, this newfound spiritual calling is emphasised further by the divergent questlines that appear in the latter half of the story. Frappier suggests that Perceval's refusal to follow Gauvain in his quest for worldly prowess – instead choosing the seemingly insurmountable task of re-locating the grail (a task that he is told is impossible) – shows his refusal of fate and his development toward self-realisation and control over his own destiny.[69] Perceval's piety effectively becomes the prevailing characteristic of his developing

---

[66] Jean Vendryus, 'Les éléments celtiques de la légende du Graal.' *Etudes Celtiques*, Vol. 5 (1949), pp. 11-14; Rachel Bromwich (ed.), *Trioedd Ynys Prydein, the Welsh Triads* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1978), pp. cxxxiii-iv; Duggan, p. 253.

[67] Arthur C. L. Brown, 'The Bleeding Lance', *PMLA*, Vol. 25, 1 (1910), pp. 1-59; L. T. Topsfield, *Chrétien de Troyes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 210-3; Frappier, pp. 148-9; Sweeney, pp. 107-8; Duggan, p. 257.

[68] Sweeney, p. 107.

[69] Frappier, p. 136.

maturity.[70] As a result, at the point when Perceval reaches a greater understanding of his knightly responsibilities some of the ambiguity associated with the otherworldly characters and settings in *Graal* is stripped away. During Perceval's encounter with the hermit who explains his sins, we learn that the Fisher King is also Perceval's uncle (6342). As with Mabonagrain and his lady in *Erec et Enide*, then, the act of combining disparate knightly ideals into a unified whole (or in Perceval's case, at least beginning this process) allows the otherworld to be rationalised to a certain degree. The ambiguity of the faerie sign lessens as Perceval's understanding of the 'correct' path develops.

In all four examples explored in this chapter, then, Chrétien's engagement with themes and motifs related to the faerie sign is subtle. However, those passages that do constitute a potential otherworldly encounter also play an important role in our understanding of the process of self-discovery that is explored within these texts. Whilst faeries as identifiable characters remain peripheral figures in Chrétien's work, the presence of the faerie sign is still felt through the ambiguous supernatural characters (Mabonagrain, Bademagu, Meleagant, and the weavers) and spaces (the *Joie* garden, the Sword Bridge, the castle of *Pesme Aventure*, and the Fisher King's castle) that appear at key moments within each poem. In these instances, faerie-like characters serve to mirror the protagonist's own uncertainty by instigating challenges in which competing elements of the chivalric ideal are tested against one another. Chrétien's decision to either rationalise or leave vague these otherworldly settings and characters thus aids in our understanding of his *san*. In *Erec* and

[70] Chrétien's focus on knightly piety in this instance may have been influenced by his patron, Count Philip of Flanders (who died of a fever whilst on crusade in Acre in 1191). June Hall McCash, 'Chrétien's Patrons', in *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 23.

Yvain, for example, the protagonist's ability to successfully balance competing ideals of knighthood allows him to strip the otherworld of its power, effectively restoring it to a more rationalised state. By point of contrast, the otherworlds that we encounter in both *Lancelot* and *Graal* are not so easily explained. Had Chrétien finished either of these romances, the supernatural elements that exist within them might have been subject to more thorough rationalisation. However, as things stand, the unresolved nature of both the kingdom of Gorre and the Fisher King's castle draws attention to the tension and conflict that exists within each hero.

Chrétien's legacy is often discussed in the context of his influence on French Arthurian romance during the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, particularly in terms of the continuations of the grail narrative that were composed during this time.[71] Whilst the popularity of Chrétien's own romances began to fade during the thirteenth century, his role in shaping romance as a mode is apparent in the many motifs, characters, and plotlines that are first introduced in his work.[72] This chapter has demonstrated that amongst these innovations is Chrétien's purposeful engagement with the ambiguity of the faerie sign to aid in a discussion of masculine aristocratic ideals and the protagonist's journey toward self-discovery. Whilst Chrétien frequently cultivated a sense of uncertainty relating to the exact nature of the otherworld in his work, his inclusion of these faerie conventions in the context of the heroic quest narrative helped to shape future uses of the faerie sign in romance for centuries to come. The next chapter, therefore, will move on to discussion of the faerie sign in three Middle English texts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, examining the continuing relationship between faeries and knightly self-discovery first explored in Chrétien's

[71] See Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, *Chrétien Continued* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[72] Kibler, 'Introduction' to *Arthurian Romances*, p. 21.

work, and developing our understanding of how the faerie sign can be used to explore ideas of knightly piety.

Chapter Three:

Faeries and Orthodoxy in Middle English Romance

Chrétien de Troyes' final romance, *Le Conte du Graal*, raises an interesting question about the relationship between faeries and Christian orthodoxy. To what extent could the faerie sign and its associated motifs be appropriated for the purposes of religious didacticism? Faeries in romance served as ambiguous literary signs that were derived primarily from older Celtic mythologies and beliefs and used to explore the developing moral and social codes of the secular elite. In this respect, they represented a challenge to religious orthodoxies that emphasised an explicit dichotomy between good and evil, Christian and pagan. And yet, from Chrétien onwards, romance authors frequently explored the indistinct boundary between secular and spiritual, using the signs commonly associated with faeries and the otherworld to engage with themes of Christian orthodoxy.

This chapter focuses on three later Middle English texts that participate in a culture of religious didacticism, using the faerie sign as a means of exploring orthodox belief. The first of these (although the last in terms of chronology), *Sir Gowther*, effectively operates without any explicit reference to faeries, whilst still featuring many of the motifs that I have identified as associated with the faerie sign. *Gowther* still conforms to the same romance tropes that make faerie encounters a central part of the hero's progression toward self-discovery, but the ambiguous supernatural elements of the story have been replaced by an orthodox interpretation of spirits as demonic manifestations sent to tempt humanity. In the second text, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the ambiguity of the faerie sign is retained. Here, as in Chrétien's romances, the uncertain ontology of the Green Knight is used to draw specific

attention to the difficulty of the moral choices faced by the hero throughout the story. In this case, however, the otherworld serves to highlight Gawain's spiritual limitations and to emphasise chivalry's ultimate inability to function as a salvific practice. Finally, this chapter will consider *Pearl*: another of the *Gawain*-poet's works that capitalises on the ambiguity inherent in the faerie sign to explore the ineffability of the divine being. In this case, however, the poem incorporates imagery associated with the faerie sign into a religious dream vision that derives primarily from scriptural interpretations of the heavenly kingdom.

To an extent, this chapter builds on the argument made in the previous chapter, which drew attention to the often contradictory ideals of knighthood and identified the appearance of faerie-like characters and spaces as a means of testing the personal growth of the protagonist against these ideals. However, Chrétien only uses the faerie sign to discuss an idealised image of knightly piety very briefly in *Le Conte du Graal*, and any explicit connection to orthodox belief in his final romance remains tentative. By point of contrast, what we see in these later Middle English texts is an increased willingness to use the ambiguity associated with faeries in romance to explore the complicated relationship between chivalry and faith. In order to determine the faerie sign's ability to contribute to our understanding of this relationship, then, this chapter requires that we examine more closely the relationship between secular and spiritual literature and the ability of romance to comment upon orthodox belief. In addition, it requires an evaluation of our understanding of the Church's hostility toward belief in faeries and ambiguous spirits.[1] As I will demonstrate, the difficulty that theologians, Church leaders, and learned clerics experienced in categorising faeries within the orders of creation is connected to the way that faeries are used to explore ideals

[1] As Richard Firth Green has observed, the Church's stance on faerie belief was largely an antagonistic one. See *Elf Queens and Holy Friars*, p. 2.

of knightly piety within these Middle English texts. In effect, it is through their inherent ambiguity that faeries served as a useful means of exploring our limited comprehension of the divine.

Faeries and the church

One approach to faerie belief adopted by clerical authors was to dismiss the existence of faeries altogether. In the early eleventh century, for example, Bishop Burchard of Worms composed a penitential imposing the following penalty: 'Credidisti quod quidam credere solent, quod sint agrestes feminae, quas sylvaticas vocant […] Si credidisti, decem dies in pane et aqua poeniteas' [Have you believed what some are accustomed to believe, that there are rural women whom they call sylvans? […] If you have believed it, do penance on bread and water for ten days].[2] Similarly, as one sermon composed in England at the turn of the fifteenth century declares, Christians who believed in faeries had 'forsaken the faith of Christ, betrayed their baptism, and incurred the anger and enmity of God'.[3] For Burchard and others, then, faeries were not real. Instead, they represented false idols: fantasies of a misguided superstition that detracted from a devotion to God.

However, whilst an outright dismissal of the existence of faeries appears in a number of texts, the prevailing view adopted by Church authorities throughout most of the Middle Ages was that the creatures commonly referred to as faeries were in fact diabolical

[2] Burchard of Worms, *Decretum*, CXL, 0971C, *Patrologia Latina Database*. Translation taken from Green, p. 15.

[3] 'Hi vero qui in predictis credunt vel pertinaciter defendant et docent [MS: dolent] maxime cum veritatum audierint sunt infidels et paganis deteriores et maledicti a domino et sancta ecclesia quarter in anno … sciant se a fide Christi apostatasse et suum baptismatum prevaricasse ac iram domini et eius inimicitiam incurrisse'. Cambridge University Library, MS KK IV 24, ff. 240-4Ira, quoted in Green, p. 207, n. 2.

manifestations that had been placed on Earth to mislead humanity. The inquisitors at Joan of Arc's tribunal, for example, famously used Joan's knowledge of a supposed faerie tree in her hometown of Domrémy as evidence of her association with demonic spirits.[4] In large part, this approach arose from a school of thought that originated amongst the patristic theologians, and particularly in the writings of Augustine of Hippo. Augustine's defence of Christianity frequently manifested itself in terms that emphasised a binary opposition, effectively setting God against the Devil, and the Catholic Church against all other forms of belief.[5] Graeco-Roman deities and spirits related to pagan worship were identified within this worldview as demonic beings who possessed some limited power to manipulate the natural world. As such, whilst Augustine discusses faerie-like creatures such as *incubi* and *dusii* (the Gaulish equivalent of *incubi*) in his *City of God*, these spirits are clearly associated with the sinful seduction of women and lack any degree of ambiguity in their character (XV:23).[6]

This binary approach to the supernatural was further developed in the thirteenth century by Thomas Aquinas, whose work on metaphysics, angelology, and demonology was hugely influential. Like Augustine, Aquinas saw supernatural spirits as either wholly good or evil. Angels lacked a corporeal form, and so their cognition differed from that of humans. Instead of learning gradually over time, they were gifted with everything that they knew at the moment of creation. As a result, an angel's decision to be either good or evil was instantaneous and unchanging. Those that chose good sided with God and remained in

[4] *The Trial of Jeanne d'Arc*, trans. by W. P. Barrett (London: Routledge, 1931), p. 273.

[5] Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 80.

[6] Saint Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. by Henry Bettenson, intro. by G. R. Evans (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003), p. 638.

heaven, whilst those that chose evil descended into Hell and became demons.[7] Following on from Augustine, Aquinas adopted a similarly binary approach to all spirits. In this context, any superstitious belief, wonder, or act of ritual magic not ascribed to God through the doctrine of the Catholic Church must be demonic in origin and, therefore, an act of evil. Superstitious practices, Aquinas writes, were always to be considered a misguided perversion of true religion or, at worst, a direct appeal to corrupting demonic powers.[8] In addition to this, Aquinas argued that demons were able to assume human form in order to have intercourse with mortals. However, he maintained that demons themselves were not capable of producing children, and so any baby that was produced from such a union could only result from stolen human semen (an issue that will be relevant when we come to discuss *Sir Gowther* later in this chapter).[9]

The belief that demons could shapeshift in order to deceive humans appears in a wide range of spiritual and secular texts, including during a discussion between the summoner and the friar in Chaucer's *Friar's Tale*:

> "I wende ye were a yeman trewely.
>
> Ye han a mannes shap as wel as I;
>
> Han ye a figure thanne determinat

[7] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, 61 Vols. (London: Blackfriars, 1968), Ia, q.64, Art. II. See also, Peter Lombard's *Book of Sentences* (c.1150s), in which he writes about the coming into being of angels and demons, the distinction between good and bad angels (demons), and where fallen angels could be found: some in hell and some in the middle air. Peter Lombard, *Sententiae In IV Libris Distinctae*, 2 Vols. (Rome: Colleggi S. Bonaventurae Ad Claras Aquas, 1971), I.ii, Book II, dists. 2-11.

[8] Aquinas divides superstitious practice into three parts: idolatry, or the wrongful worship of a creature or thing; divination, or any attempt to seek knowledge of the divine other than through God; and superstitious observances, the worshipping of God in an improper manner. *Summa Theologiæ*, IIa-IIae, q.92, Art. I-II; q. 93, Art. I-II.

[9] Ia, q. 51, Art. III, Obj. 6.

In helle, ther ye been in youre estat?"

"Nay, certainly," quod he, "ther have we noon;

But whan us liketh we kan take us oon,

Or elles make yow seme we been shape;

Somtyme lyk a man, or lyk an ape,

Or lyk an angel kan I ryde or go.

It is no wonder thyng thogh it be so;

A lowsy jogelour kan deceyve thee,

And pardee, yet kan I moore craft than he."

(III, 1457-68)

However, whilst the impact of Aquinas' work on demonology was certainly far-reaching, not all clerical writers agreed with the strict divisions between light and dark imposed by both Augustine and Aquinas. As such, some sources attempt to account for the existence of ambiguous spirits by categorising them as fallen angels belonging to neither Heaven nor Hell, but to a realm that borders more closely on Middle Earth. In the *South English Legendary*, for example, we find accounts of angels who have fallen but who will return to heaven when Doomsday comes:

Oþer were þat for hom somdel . in misþoȝt were

Ac naþeles hi hulde bet mid God . ac vnneþe hi forbere

Þulke wende out of heuene ek . and aboue þe oþere beoþ

Anhei vnder þe firmament . and Godes wille iseoþ

And so ssolleþ be[o] somdel in pine . forte þe worles ende

Ac hi ssolleþ a Domesday . aʒen to heuene wende.

(201-6) [10]

> There were others who, because their thoughts strayed somewhat (even though they were more inclined to God, they barely held themselves back) also departed from heaven, and they are above the others, raised up below the heavens, and recognize God's will; and so they must be punished somewhat until the end of the world, but they shall return again to heaven at Doomsday.[11]

As Richard Firth Green has suggested, such examples draw attention to the notion of 'two classes of devil' in medieval ecclesiastical thought: those who supported Satan during the War of Heaven, and those 'less-committed' angels who were cast out of Heaven for their failure to choose a side.[12] In light of this, the existence of fallen angels frequently appears as an orthodox explanation for the kind of phenomena usually attributed to faeries in folklore and popular superstition. For instance, in the fourteenth-century Vernon Manuscript's *Life of Adam and Eve*, fallen angels are associated with sudden sicknesses and disappearance in a way that draws specific attention to their relationship with faeries: 'Yf eny mon is elve-inome

[10] 'St. Michael, Part II', in *The South English Legendary*, ed. by Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J Mill, 3 vols., EETS OS, 335, 336, 344 (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 2, pp. 408-10.

[11] Translation taken from Green, p. 24.

[12] Green suggests that the notion of lesser demons can be traced back as far as the third century (p. 23). See also W. P. Ker, 'The Craven Angels', *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 6 (1911), pp. 85-7; C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, pp. 135-6; and James Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, pp. 14-5.

[elf-taken] other elf-iblowe [elf-blown], he hit hath of the angelus that fellen out of hevene' (79-80).[13]

The above examples demonstrate that interpretations of the existence of ambiguous spirits varied considerably from source to source. The difficulty that ecclesiastical writers experienced in defining faeries reflects the awkward position that faeries inhabited on the fringes of Christian belief. However, despite various attempts to dismiss faerie belief or to incorporate such beliefs into an orthodox worldview, it is clear that ambiguous, difficult-to-define faeries continued to play an important role in medieval 'popular culture'.[14] Of particular note in this regard are the various records of faerie encounters that feature in the chronicles and collected stories of clerical writers during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium*, for instance, Map recounts a number of tales that appear to describe encounters with faeries or faerie-like beings. Amongst these is the story of *Henno cum dentibus* (Henno with the teeth), who happens upon a beautiful, wealthy maiden in a wood at noon.[15] Henno brings the maiden back to his house where he quickly marries her. However, as time passes, Henno's mother begins to grow increasingly suspicious that his new wife always avoids holy water and will not attend the consecration of the host during Church services. In a scene that shares some clear parallels with Jean d'Arras' *Melusine*, Henno's mother spies on his wife and sees her transforming into a dragon whilst bathing.[16] Henno's mother tells him what she has seen and the two of them, accompanied by a priest, come upon

[13] Edited in Norman Blake, *Middle English Religious Prose* (London: Arnold, 1972), pp. 106-7.

[14] For a discussion of faerie belief in the context of 'popular culture' (particularly in relation to an awareness of faeries from within the secular elite as well as in the labouring classes), see Green, pp. 42-7.

[15] Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, pp. 348-9.

[16] Jean D'Arras, *Melusine*, ed. by A. K. Donald, EETS OS (London: Kegan Paul, 1895), pp. 296-7.

his wife unawares and sprinkle holy water on her, at which point she shrieks loudly and flies out through the ceiling.

The mysterious dragon lady's aversion to holy water and communion in this story seems to suggest a demonic ontology. However, much like his contemporary Chrétien de Troyes, Map is to some extent playfully exploiting the ambiguity of the supernatural being in this account. Her actions in the first half of the story belie any evil intentions: she attends church regularly (when Holy Communion is not being taken) and distributes bread to orphans and widows. It is only at the very end of the story that Map turns to moral didacticism in a way that emphasises the apparent diabolical nature of Henno's wife and her descendants:

> Ne miremini si Dominus as/cendit corporaliter, cum hoc pessimis permiserit creaturis, quas eciam necesse sit deorsum inuitas trahi. Huius adhuc extat multa progenies.
>
> (dist. iv, c. 9)

> Marvel not that the Lord ascended to heaven with his body, since he has permitted such abominable creatures to do so, creatures which must in the end be dragged downwards against their will. This lady had a numerous progeny, yet living.

Map thus uses the story of Henno with the teeth to draw attention to the corrupting and dangerous supernatural forces that inhabit the world. As C. S. Watkins has observed, the degree of ambiguity that features throughout the story serves as a means for Map to warn

his audience of the delusions and traps used by demons to ensnare the unwary.[17] Map plays with ambiguity in a way that builds intrigue and suspense, only to return the reader to a traditional Augustinian conception of good and evil in which Henno's wife and her progeny are directly contrasted with the ascension of Christ.

Similar examples – such as the stories of Gwestin Gwestiniog, Eadric the Wild, and Gerbert of Burgundy[18] – appear throughout *De Nugis*. In each instance, Map draws on the inherent ambiguity of faerie-like beings in a way that seeks to justify the inclusion of supernatural stories in his work by underpinning each tale with 'a traditional and austere theology'.[19] To a lesser extent, this approach also appears in the works of Map's contemporaries, Gerald of Wales and Gervase of Tilbury, both of whom used ambiguous wonders as a means of moralising or validating orthodox interpretations of the world.[20] For example, Gervase writes:

> Hoc equidem a uiris omni exceptione maioribus cotidie scimus probatum, quod quosdam huiusmodi laraurum, quas fadas nominant, amatores audiuimus, et cum ad aliarum feminarum matrimonia se transtulerunt, ante mortuos quam cum superinductis carnali se copula immiscuerint; plerosque in summa temporali felicitate uidimus stetisse, qui, cum ab huiuscemodi fadarum se abstraxerunt amplexibus aut illas

[17] C. S. Watkins, *History and the Supernatural*, pp. 203-4.

[18] See dist. ii, c. 11; dist. ii, c. 12, and dist. iv, c. 11.

[19] Watkins, p. 203.

[20] Ibid, pp. 208-15.

> publicauerunt eloquio, non tantum temporales successus sed etiam misere uite solatium amisserunt.
>
> (III.86) [21]

> But here is something we do know, confirmed daily as it is by men who are above all reproach: we have heard that some men have become the lovers of [hobgoblins] of this kind, which they call fays, and when they have transferred their affections with a view to marrying other women, they have died before they could enjoy carnal union with their new partners. And we have seen many men who had attained the summit of worldly happiness, but then, as soon as they renounced the embraces of fays of this kind, or spoke about them in public, they lost not only their worldly prosperity, but even the solace of a wretched life.

Gervase argued that faeries were akin to demons, but he also believed that their sin was not quite as egregious as those of the demonic orders: 'uerum hi qui cum diabolo minus superbierunt ad huiusmodi illuiones reseruati sunt ad hominum penam' ['it must be, then, that those who sided with the devil but whose pride was less grievous were reserved to provide phantoms of this nature to punish humankind'] (III.86). Accordingly, Gervase's approach represents a shift away from the Augustinian divisions of good and evil toward a

[21] Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, ed. and trans. by S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 730-1.

more encompassing form of speculative inquiry, one that allowed for an increasingly free engagement with storytelling and with ambiguous wonders.[22]

These works therefore represent some of the diverse ways that an author might approach the topic of ambiguous supernatural beings. Even so, each of these clerical writers demonstrates, to a greater or lesser extent, a desire to turn accounts of marvels to didactic purposes by emphasising the perils of supernatural temptation. To some degree, this recalls arguments raised in the previous chapter concerning the blending of secular and spiritual ideals taking place in the courts of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Europe. Whilst these accounts do not downplay the dismissive or negative approaches to faeries and ambiguous supernatural beings adopted by Church authorities, they do demonstrate that faeries formed part of a much wider intellectual conversation concerning the unresolved boundaries of orthodoxy: a conversation that was taking place in courts where the lay and clerical worlds came together.

In this respect, the faerie sign's ability to function as a means of discussing orthodox belief constitutes part of a much broader debate regarding our understanding of romance as a secular literary mode. Arguments that there is Christian symbolism deliberately concealed within apparently secular texts have been a controversial strand in literary criticism since the 1950s, when D. W. Robertson Jr. argued that all medieval literature had an underlying Christian meaning.[23] Robertson's 'exegetical' movement fell out of fashion by the 1980s, largely as a result of the restrictive way in which it attempted to interpret all medieval

[22] Watkins, pp. 213-4.

[23] See D. W. Robertson Jr., 'The Doctrine of Charity in Mediaeval Literary Gardens', *Speculum*, Vol. 26 (1951), pp. 24-49; *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962); and 'The Concept of Courtly Love as an Impediment to the Understanding of Medieval Texts', in *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, ed. by F. X. Newman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1968), pp. 1-18.

thought, but the question of whether secular medieval texts can be interpreted in a spiritual context remains.[24] In more recent years, scholarship has drawn attention to vernacular literature as an important medium for religious teaching and expression in the Middle Ages.[25] Likewise, the presence of vernacular literature within monastic institutions and the familiarity that ecclesiastical figures had for these stories can be ascertained from both written and archaeological records. The *Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues*, for example, lists a variety of romances amongst the collections of Dover Priory, Peterborough Abbey and multiple Benedictine, Cistercian, Gilbertine and Premonstratensian libraries.[26] In Reading Abbey, amongst the texts dealing with doctrine, devotion, and canon law, the library included what is now British Library MS Harley 978, a manuscript that features the largest surviving collection of Marie de France's fables and lais.[27] Beyond the records of library catalogues, the influence of secular literature on the culture of the Church can be gleaned from archaeological evidence. An excavation at Chertsey Abbey in the nineteenth century, for example, unearthed a series of earthenware floor tiles that depicted scenes associated with the legends and romances of Tristan and Iseult.[28] Clearly, then, romances were popular far beyond the secular

[24] For a critique of Robertson's argument, see E. Talbot Donaldson's 1958 essay 'Patristic Exegesis in the Criticism of Medieval Literature: The Opposition', reprinted in E. Talbot Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (London: Athlone, 1970), pp. 134-53.

[25] See Nicholas Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409', *Speculum*, Vol. 70 (1995), pp. 822-64; Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Duncan Robertson, and Nancy Bradley Warren (eds.), *The Vernacular Spirit* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (eds.), *The Vulgar Tongue* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

[26] To give just one example of this, the library catalogue of Peterborough Abbey lists eleven romances amongst its collection, including *Amis et Amiloun*, *Le Chanson de Sebile*, *Gui de Bourgogne*, *Otinel*, and *Tristan*. See *Peterborough Abbey*, ed. by Karsten Friis-Jensen and James M. W. Willoughby (London: The British Library, 2001), p. 240.

[27] Alan Coates, *English Medieval Books* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), p.74.

[28] Melissa Furrow, *Expectations of Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2009), pp. 6-9. Whilst evidence of secular literature in ecclesiastical architecture is rare, the Chertsey tiles are not an isolated phenomenon. Another example of this is the archivolt of the north portal in the cathedral of Modena in Italy, which displays an early

courtly societies that have generally been identified as the primary audience for such works. Both cultures were subject to a cross-pollination of ideas, and to place a strict divide between secular and spiritual literature is to ignore their close proximity to one another.

Therefore, as Barbara Newman has argued, we might better understand the presence of Christian symbolism in secular literature as a result of shared ideals and imagery: an interplay between spiritual and secular, with no single, dominant cultural mode.[29] By expanding Newman's argument to encompass the faerie sign, we can accept that faeries can be as effectively used as part of an exploration of orthodox belief and morality as they are for considering more secular ideals. Indeed, their ability to function as mirrors of humanity and arbiters of human action places them in an ideal position to do so. In the context of the romance quest, faeries serve to challenge the disparate aspects of the knightly persona, and so it is unsurprising that certain authors found faeries to be an effective means of amalgamating secular and spiritual ideals as well. Evidence of this has already been explored briefly in the previous chapter in relation to Chrétien's use of Christian iconography in the otherworldly castle of the Fisher King. However, whilst Chrétien's allusions to Christianity remained vague, the examples explored in the rest of this chapter demonstrate, more explicitly, their authors' abilities to adapt motifs commonly associated with the faerie sign to Christian, orthodox purposes.

Breton version of Guinevere's abduction into Gorre (as depicted in Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot*). See Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, p. 227.

[29] Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover*.

Sir Gowther and the sanitisation of the faerie sign

The late fifteenth-century Breton lay *Sir Gowther* is undoubtedly one of the most striking examples of the faerie sign's adaptation to suit a more spiritual version of the heroic quest narrative. Surviving in two manuscripts (British Library Royal MS 17.B.43 and National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.3.1), *Sir Gowther* incorporates many of the themes and motifs that are commonly associated with faeries. The poem begins with a duchess wandering in an orchard, lamenting her inability to conceive a child. Whilst walking there, she encounters a figure who is 'lyke hur lorde' (72) in appearance, who convinces her to lie down beneath a tree where they have sex.[30] When he is finished, the man leaps up and reveals himself to be a 'felturd [shaggy] fende' (74), but before the duchess has a chance to run away, the fiend prophesises that she will bear a child who will become a fearsome, uncontrollable warrior (76-8).[31]

The supernatural manifestation that appears in *Gowther* is explicitly demonic, then, but the duchess' encounter with the fiend still shares some parallels with examples of faerie encounters in romance. The managed woodland setting and the duchess' isolation from the rest of the court both draw attention to the possibility of an otherworldly boundary; the orchard tree brings to mind the grafted fruit trees that are associated with faerie abductions in both *Sir Orfeo* and *Thomas of Erceldoune*; and the shapeshifting abilities of the fiend resemble the transformations of the loathly ladies in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and *The Wedding*

[30] *Sir Gowther*, in *The Middle English Breton Lays*. Hereafter cited in text.

[31] The meeting itself is a variation of the folkloric Wish Child motif, in which a parent, desperate for a child, makes a pact with a supernatural entity. The resulting offspring is born with an obligation or connection to the supernatural realm from which they must ultimately be set free. For an account of the Wish Child motif and its connection to *Sir Gowther*, see Gail Ashton, *Medieval English Romance in Context* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 45.

of Gawain and Dame Ragnelle. There is also a strong similarity between the opening of *Sir Gowther* and the Middle English poem *Sir Degaré*, in which a maiden flees into a forest to escape her potentially incestuous father, only to be raped by a faerie knight instead (92-112).[32] In both examples, the encounter results in the birth of a child who becomes the main focal point of the story thereafter, and the supernatural circumstances surrounding his birth serve as an explanation for the exceptional abilities that are attributed to him later in life. In the case of *Degaré*, for instance, the hero is praised for single-handedly taking down a dragon without any former combat experience and armed only with an oak branch (363-84). By point of contrast, Gowther's achievements are intended to be both destructive and terrifying, but they are no less exceptional for this. Indeed, the extent to which Gowther may be considered exceptional is based largely on the sheer number of atrocities that he commits throughout the first half of the poem. Before Gowther is one year old, he has suckled nine wet nurses to death and bitten his own mother's nipple off (109-32). At the age of fifteen, he makes himself a large curved sword specifically to terrorise other people (139-44). When Gowther becomes Duke, he refuses to go to Mass, he kills men of the Church wherever he finds them, he rapes women, and he murders their husbands (169-74, 193-204). Gowther and his men even attack and rape a convent of nuns before burning them all to death inside their nunnery (181-92).

Gowther's actions are therefore intended to be a direct reflection of his demonic parentage. Indeed, the poet draws particular attention to this facet of his character, describing how Gowther 'wold wyrke [h]is fadur wyll' (that is, the will of his father the demon, 176) through his many evil deeds. In light of this, whilst many of the motifs commonly attributed to faerie romance are present in the poem's opening, their purpose has been

[32] *Sir Degaré*, in *The Middle English Breton Lays*.

altered to achieve a more orthodox, interpretation of an otherworldly encounter. The poem effectively shifts away from the ambiguity commonly associated with the faerie sign toward a more Thomistic view of supernatural spirits as demonic entities that imitate and copulate with humans for purely malevolent reasons.

The poet's reason for pursuing this strategy relates to the redemptive arc that makes up the second half of Gowther's story. When Gowther learns that he was fathered by a 'fende' (231), he appears to show genuine contrition for his actions. He travels to Rome to seek guidance from the Pope, who hears Gowther's confession, and he is given instruction regarding the penance that he must undertake in order to redeem his soul. Gowther must relinquish his worldly possessions (including the sword that he made for himself when he was fifteen), he must take a vow of silence, and he is only permitted to eat food that has been taken from the mouth of a dog (289-300). After agreeing to these terms, Gowther travels to the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, where he eats with the Emperor's hunting hounds and prays to God to provide armour and weapons so that he can assist with a war against a powerful Sultan (382-404). Gowther's prayer is granted and he fights valiantly against the Sultan for three days without anyone knowing his name. His identity is finally revealed to the court by the Emperor's mute daughter, who falls from a tower when she sees Gowther injured on the battlefield. After two days of unconsciousness, the princess awakes and declares Gowther to be free of all past sins:

> Ho [she] seyd, "My lord of heyvon gretys the well,
> And forgyffeus the thi syn yche a dell,
> And grantys the tho blys;
> And byddus the speyke on hardely,

Eyte and drynke and make mery;

Thu schallt be won of His."

(661-6)

The final stanzas of the poem tell of Gowther's marriage to the princess and his inheritance of the imperial throne. As Emperor, Gowther builds an abbey where nuns pray for the souls of those he burned to death in his youth and, after his death, strange miracles are reported by those who visit his tomb (703-44).

Gowther's development in the latter half of the poem thus places considerable emphasis on the hero's salvation through confession. Gowther demonstrates genuine contrition for his sins and accordingly gives his confession to no lesser authority than the Pope. The extremity of his actions and the significant transition that occurs between the two halves of the poem effectively serve to highlight the power of the sacraments to invoke God's forgiveness. As a result, Gowther's absolution appears to come directly from the 'lord of heyvon' (albeit via the princess, who functions as both romance love interest and divine mouthpiece). By the conclusion of Gowther's story, his transformation from sinner to saint is so absolute that the final stanzas of the poem resemble hagiography: the poet effectively validates Gowther's holiness through reports of the miracles that are witnessed around his tomb.

The religious didacticism present in *Sir Gowther* and the poem's resemblance to a saint's life have both been discussed at length by Andrea Hopkins, who classifies the poem as a hagiographical (or penitential) romance alongside similar works such as *Guy of Warwick*,

Ysumbras, and *Roberd of Cisyle*.[33] For Hopkins, Gowther's story draws upon orthodox belief in the inherent limitlessness of divine grace (even for 'the most sinful man imaginable'), whilst also establishing Gowther as an everyman figure 'who has inherited Original Sin, and seeks to escape from the burden of his naturally sinful flesh'.[34] However, she also recognises that Gowther's penitential arc sits in awkward relation with orthodox practices of the period. Of particular note here is the Pope's bizarre command that Gowther 'eyt no meyt [food] bot that thu revus [snatch] of howndus mothe' (296). The dehumanising nature of the punishment has little to do with actual penitential practices and instead seems to highlight the poet's blending of both spiritual and secular influences. Here, emphasis is placed on Gowther's humiliation through his association with animals, which can be connected to the role that madness often plays in Arthurian romance.[35] In both cases, characters are stripped of their former identity, allowing for a reconstitution of the ideals that define their self-image, but in *Sir Gowther*, this secular motif has been adapted to suit the needs of a penitential narrative arc.

In much the same way, the poet develops ideas and images associated with the faerie sign to accommodate a more orthodox agenda. Motifs linked to magic and faeries are present throughout the story, from the isolated encounter in the orchard, to the demon's sudden transformation from courtly to monstrous, to the emphasis placed on Gowther's sword as a representation of his otherworldly power. However, these otherworldly signifiers have also been stripped of all ambiguity as a result of the heightened emphasis on orthodoxy within the poem, replaced instead by the certainty of an encounter with a demonic spirit in the first half of the story, and an emphasis on divine intervention in the second. Similarly, the moral

[33] Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).

[34] Ibid, p. 170.

[35] See, for example, *Sir Orfeo* or *Le Chevalier au Lion*.

challenge to the protagonist, a challenge that might conventionally be associated with a faerie encounter in romance, is instead instigated by the Pope. The chivalrous hero still undergoes a process of individuation in the second half of the story, but that process has been stripped of its association with faeries, and also of its complexity. The path to self-discovery for a knight is no longer represented as an amalgamation of conflicting religious, social and personal motivations, but a straightforward linear progression from sinner to saved.

Richard Firth Green has argued that stories such as *Sir Gowther* represent the sanitisation of faeries: a result of the ecclesiastical training of the writers who attempted to police superstitious belief during the Middle Ages, and who defined all aspects of creation within Augustinian divisions of light and dark.[36] In the context of the uneasy relationship that medieval authors (both ecclesiastical and secular) had with faeries, it is unsurprising to find that some texts attempted to adapt the conventions of the faerie sign in order to present a less problematic interpretation of otherworldly spirits. However, as Green points out, we do not necessarily need to read the term 'sanitisation' in a reductive context. Rather, the orthodox interpretation of the faerie sign in *Sir Gowther* attests to the seriousness with which we should be thinking about faeries in medieval literature more generally.

The faerie sign in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Whilst *Sir Gowther* presents an interesting instance of the faerie sign being used to convey an orthodox message, it raises the question as to whether faeries can be used in such a way without being stripped of the ambiguity that defines their presence elsewhere in romance.

[36] Green, p. 67.

To explore this question more thoroughly, this chapter now turns to the late fourteenth-century Middle English romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. *Sir Gawain* is one of four texts (along with *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, and *Patience*) assumed to be composed by a single, anonymous poet, normally referred to as the *Gawain*-poet.[37] Little is known about the author of these works, other than his likely association with Cheshire (identified through the dialect of the poems) and some notion of the works that he had access to during the course of his life, based on the texts that can be identified as influencing the style and content of his poems. He appears, for example, to have had a deep familiarity with the Latin Vulgate Bible, but whether this serves as evidence of a clerical education remains unclear. Whilst some critics have suggested that the *Gawain*-poet may have been a priest, others have argued that he likely never rose above the rank of clerk in the minor orders.[38] There is also a great deal of conjecture in relation to his familiarity with the court. For instance, the descriptions of castle architecture and hunting that appear in *Sir Gawain* are detailed enough to suggest that he was familiar with courtly life, but once again the exact nature of his involvement with court life (and in what form) is uncertain.[39]

The poet's real identity will likely always remain unknown, but it is sufficient to note here that he probably had some level of clerical education and had spent time in court, and was familiar with the complex interplay of ideas between the two cultures. In addition to texts

[37] Putter and Stokes (eds), *The Works of the Gawain Poet*, p. ix.

[38] Michelle Sweeney, 'Questioning Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: Teaching the Text through its Medieval English Christian Context', in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England*, 161-75, p. 162; Putter and Stokes, pp. xiii-xv; and Cecilia A. Hatt, *God and the Gawain-Poet* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2015), pp. 225-6.

[39] Putter and Stokes, p. xiv. Various plausible (although ultimately unprovable) theories have been put forward connecting the *Gawain*-poet to a particular court or a high-status ecclesiastical household. Examples of this include a cleric in Richard II's Cheshire retinue or a member of a clerical estate belonging to archbishop Courtenay or archbishop Arundel. See (respectively), Michael W. Twomey, 'The *Gawain*-poet', in *Readings in Medieval Texts*, ed. by David Johnson and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 273-87, pp. 273-4; and Hatt, p. 225.

commonly associated with a clerical education, the *Gawain*-poet appears to have been well acquainted with French vernacular literature, including works such as *Roman de la Rose*, the Vulgate *Lancelot*, and the poems of Chrétien de Troyes.[40] Indeed, the poet's confident mastery of romance convention in *Sir Gawain* suggests that he had an extensive knowledge of this type of literature, along with the themes and motifs that helped to define it. His familiarity with Chrétien's work, in particular, establishes an important connection to the traditions of Arthurian romance and the use of the faerie sign as a means of identifying ambiguous otherworldly encounters. Like Chrétien's romances, *Sir Gawain* draws heavily on supernatural themes and unexplainable marvels, using them as narrative devices in a storyline that endeavours to test the ideals of courtly society. In this regard, the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain* serves a similar function to figures such as Mabonagrain in *Erec et Enide* or the Fisher King in *Le Conte du Graal*: challenging the protagonist's ability to balance disparate aspects of his knightly persona and driving him toward a greater self-understanding.

Our first indication of the otherworldly nature of the Green Knight is in relation to his unnaturally large size and his unusual colour. He is 'enker [vivid] grene' (150) with a broad torso and long limbs, and he is so tall that he might be 'Half etayn [giant]' (140). However, his appearance is also beautiful. The poet describes him as 'the merriest [most handsome] in his muckel [size] that might ever ride' (142), with 'Ful clene [comely/respectable]' features (146). Similarly, the knight's clothes display a level of refinement and wealth that make them entirely appropriate attire for the grandeur of a king's feasting hall (distinguished only by the fact that they are also entirely green). His cloak is lined with a fine fur trim (154); his spurs are

[40] Putter and Stokes, p. xiv

golden with silken straps (159); and all his garments are beautifully embroidered with birds and butterflies and studded with beads and gems (162-7).

Through the description that the poet gives us, then, the Green Knight is intended to epitomise two opposing characteristics at once. He is both terrible and beautiful, both inhuman and civilised, a character who encapsulates simultaneously the majesty and danger associated with lightning:

> He loked as layt so light,
> So sayd all that him sye;
> Hit semed as no man might
> Under his dintes drye.
>
> (199-202)

> All who saw him said he looked as bright as lightning; it seemed
> that no man might endure his blows.

To the extent that the Green Knight mirrors human traits, he presents an image of courtly splendour that matches the magnificence of Arthur's court, but there are also several indications that he is intended to resemble Gawain specifically, both in appearance and in action. For instance, the *Gawain*-poet draws particular attention to the finery of each character's clothing in a way that establishes a close comparison between the two. Both characters are dressed in rich garments that are heavily embellished with gold (167, 577, 587), decorated with jewels (162-3, 609), and embroidered with birds (166, 610-2). Likewise, the stanzas that describe the two beheading sequences (the Green Knight's actual decapitation

and Gawain's near miss) draw a clear comparison between the two figures though the emphasis that is placed on the swinging motion of the axe and the vivid description of metal slicing flesh (420-25, 2310-13). Of particular note here is the attention that is paid to colour. In both cases, the axe's swing causes bright red blood to spurt out of the wound, landing on the Green Knight's body in the first instance (429), and on the green earth beneath Gawain in the second (2314).

The Green Knight shares some parallels with Chrétien's Mabonagrain, a character who is described in terms that also juxtapose size and beauty (*Erec et Enide*, 5892-7), and who serves as a mirror image to Erec: embodying the challenges that Erec has overcome throughout the course of the poem. However, the greenness of the knight in *Sir Gawain* is also a more definitive sign of his magical status than anything found in *Erec*. As Helen Cooper has observed, knights named after a particular colour in romance traditionally take that name from the colour of their armour and trappings alone.[41] By contrast, the Green Knight's colouring covers his entire body, including his hair and beard (179-82), and whilst the figure's identity remains unclear, there is also little doubt that this counts as the 'mervayl' (94) that Arthur wishes to see before he will sit down to eat.[42]

The enigmatic but clearly supernatural status of the Green Knight thus helps to cultivate a degree of uncertainty regarding his motivations. When he first appears in Arthur's court, it is unclear whether he has come there with peaceful intentions or whether he means to cause harm. After all, we do not learn the true meaning of his sudden appearance until the

[41] Helen Cooper, 'The Supernatural', in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, 277-91, p. 287.

[42] The colour green brings to mind a wild man or green man figure, or it may be linked to the devil (who is sometimes depicted wearing green), although no definitive connection can be made in any of these cases. For more on what the colour green means in *Sir Gawain*, see Lawrence Besserman, 'The Idea of the Green Knight', pp. 219-39; and Derek Brewer, 'The Colour Green', in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, pp. 181-90.

very end of the poem, when he reveals that he was sent to the court by Morgan le Fay to test the glory and pride of its knights and to frighten Guinevere to death through unearthly spectacle (2457-62). Prior to this, the *Gawain*-poet actively encourages his audience to doubt the Green Knight's purpose. This uncertainty is perhaps best exemplified by the two items – a spray of holly and a large axe (206-8) – that he holds in each hand at the start of the poem. As with the descriptions of his appearance, these two items express opposing characteristics. The Green Knight himself states that the holly is a symbol of peaceful intent, declaring, 'Ye may be siker [assured] by this braunch that I bere here / That I passe as in pese and no plyt seche' (265-6), but the axe in his other hand also suggests another purpose. In light of this, it has been argued that the Green Knight never specifies that the game should involve beheading: he refers only to a *strok* [blow] that must be administered, which might be carried out as well with the branch as with the axe.[43] It is only because of Arthur's hasty decision to reach for the axe that Gawain must step in to rescue the King from folly.

Another context in which we find an ambiguous otherworldliness in *Sir Gawain* is during Gawain's stay in Hautdesert, which the poet describes as 'A castel the comlokest that ever knight aghte [the most splendid castle that ever a knight owned]' (767) which 'schemered and schon' (772), almost like a mirage. The superlative nature of the castle, the forest setting that Gawain finds himself in – 'meryly he rides / Into a forest ful depe' (740-1) – and his isolation from the rest of the court all constitute motifs commonly associated with the faerie sign. However, as with the Green Knight, the exact nature of the castle remains unclear, firstly as a result of the poet's realistic descriptions of fourteenth-century castle

[43] Laura Ashe, 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Limits of Chivalry', in *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance*, ed. by Laura Ashe, Ivana Djordjević and Judith Weiss (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010), 159-72, p. 168. See also Sheri Ann Strite, '*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: To Behead or Not to Behead – That *Is* a Question', *Philological Quarterly*, Vol. 70 (1991), pp. 1-12.

architecture, but also due to the spiritual significance ascribed to its sudden appearance.[44] The poet tells us that Gawain, in his desire to find a place to attend mass on Christmas Eve, prays to God and Mary and crosses himself three times. With the third gesture, he becomes instantly aware of the castle, which stands in a clearing on a rising mound with parkland all about it (764-8). The proximity of these two events seems to imply that Hautdesert has appeared in answer to Gawain's prayer. However, the events that transpire within the castle – particularly Lady Bertilak's visits to Gawain in his bedchamber – cast serious doubt on Hautdesert representing a manifestation of divine will, especially considering the emphasis that is placed on the Blessed Virgin, a symbol par excellence of chastity, in Gawain's prayer.[45] The uncertainty of this explanation for Hautdesert's sudden appearance implies that the *Gawain*-poet is intentionally casting doubt on the castle's exact nature. Whilst Hautdesert may at first appear paradisiacal, the author is also playing with his audience's prior understanding of Arthurian romance and the dangers that beautiful castles might entail.

Further emphasis is placed on this relationship between beauty and danger within the castle itself, through the juxtaposed bedchamber and hunting scenes that constitute the entirety of Fitt III. Here, the close proximity between scenes of seduction and visceral descriptions of the hunt are intended to emphasise the precarious position that Gawain finds himself in: both in his attempt to resist Lady Bertilak's advances, and in his promise to honour the Exchange of Winnings game instigated by Lord Bertilak. For instance, after Gawain's first bedroom tryst, the poet describes the butchering of hunted deer in noticeably gory detail:

[44] For an account of the castle's realism, see Michael Thompson, 'Castles', in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, pp. 119-30.

[45] Cooper, 'The Supernatural', p. 290.

Sithen rytte thay the foure lymmes and rent of the hyde.
Then brek thay the bale, the boweles out token
Lystily for lausyng the lere of the knotte.
Thay gripped to the gargulun and graythly departed
The wesaunt fro the wynde-hole and walt out the guttes.

(1332-6)

Afterward, they cut the skin around the four limbs and tore off the hide. Then they broke open the belly and took out the entrails carefully to avoid undoing the ligature of the knot. They took hold of the throat and neatly separated the gullet from the windpipe and pulled out the guts.

Similar descriptions, involving a boar and a fox respectively, follow the second and third encounters between Gawain and Lady Bertilak.[46] The strong association being made between the beauty and death in these juxtaposing scenes is reminiscent of the Celtic otherworldly tradition and its impact on the faerie otherworlds of romance. Like the paradisiacal realm of the dead (Mag Mell) referred to in *Immram Brain*, the courtyard of corpses in *Sir Orfeo*, or the garden filled with decapitated heads in *Erec et Enide*, the hunting scenes in *Sir Gawain* cultivate a level of intrigue intended to unsettle the audience and to drive narrative tension. However, Gawain's obliviousness to the violence of the hunt and the quotidian nature of the acts being perpetrated heightens our uncertainty as to whether these scenes constitute a

[46] On the final day, Gawain's decision to conceal the girdle from Lord Bertilak (an act of deceit on Gawain's part) is juxtaposed with the hunting of a fox who attempts to escape his fate through 'wyles [cunning]' (1711).

threat to Gawain's person. The *Gawain*-poet establishes a contrast between beauty and death, but in a way that hinders the audience's ability to draw any definite conclusions about the nature of the castle and its inhabitants. This setting remains equivocal throughout the poem.

The theology of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

The poet's reason for cultivating a degree of uncertainty throughout the poem lies in the significance of the beheading game and its relevance to Gawain's self-development. However, the extent to which this development centres on orthodox ideals has been a matter of debate amongst critics for some time. Indeed, the extensive body of scholarship on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* largely serves to emphasise its resistance to a single interpretation or set of meanings, and this is nowhere more evident than in its approach to Christianity.

Gawain is certainly a pious Christian in many respects. Indeed, the poet takes care to emphasise that Gawain's Christian virtues 'Were harder happed on that hathel then on any other' [were more firmly affixed to that man than to any other] (655). However, Gawain's faith is also presented as closely tied to his martial ability. This is most clearly demonstrated by the shield that Gawain carries, emblazoned with a pentagram on the front to represent Gawain's five virtues, and with an image of the Virgin Mary adorning the inside to inspire courage in battle (619-20, 643-9). The shield, like all of Gawain's armour, is beautifully decorated. As such, it is as much a display of Gawain's prowess and courtly splendour as it is a symbol of his faith.[47] Gawain may well be the godliest knight of Arthur's court, but the poet's

[47] Further emphasis on the artificiality of knighthood can be seen elsewhere in the poem. In Hautdesert, Lord Bertilak's courtiers fawn over Gawain, referring to him as a God-given gift based entirely on his outward

approach to describing Gawain's piety emphasises an endemic problem within the chivalric ideal: namely, the difficult relationship that exists between piety and prowess.

Those who have downplayed the significance of Christian iconography in *Sir Gawain* have therefore tended to do so in terms that emphasise the superficiality of the religious observances depicted within the poem. Most famously in this regard, David Aers has argued that 'Christianity is thoroughly assimilated to the celebration of forms of life aspired to by contemporary gentry and nobles'.[48] For Aers, the celebration of materiality that features throughout the *Gawain*-poet's work borders on Pelagianism, downplaying the significance of Augustinian principles that emphasise a division of body and soul, and resulting in a 'virtually Christless Christianity' being practised amongst the members of Arthur's court.[49] Comparatively, Derek Pearsall has suggested that the 'Christian colouring' of *Sir Gawain* is largely performative. Gawain has no 'inward sense of religion' and only ever goes through the motions when it comes to practising faith.[50] As a result, God has no place in the events of the poem, and Gawain's relationship with religion appears as a side note to much larger concerns surrounding honour and shame.

Honour is certainly an integral part of Gawain's knightly self-image. However, as Ad Putter has observed, much of the emphasis that is placed on honour in *Sir Gawain* draws

---

appearance and his courteous manner (920). Likewise, when Gawain sets off from Arthur's hall, Arthur's courtiers morn his loss by lamenting the titles that might have been bestowed on the young knight (678).

[48] David Aers, *Faith, Ethics and Church* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), p. 80.

[49] David Aers, 'Christianity for Courtly Subjects: Reflections on the Gawain Poet', in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, 91-101, p. 99. For a critique of Aers' arguments, see Hatt, pp. 3-10.

[50] Derek Pearsall, 'Courtesy and Chivalry in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: The Order of Shame and the Invention of Embarrassment', in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, 351-62, p. 352. See also, Lawrence M. Clopper, 'The God of the Gawain-Poet', *Modern Philology*, Vol. 94, 1 (1996), pp. 1-18. For Clopper, the religious observances depicted in *Sir Gawain* represent the inane habits of a community devoid of any true conviction in their devotion to God. The Green Knight's intervention into the Arthurian world of *Sir Gawain* thus serves as an expression of divine will, a motivating force designed to test Gawain and to direct him toward spiritual revelation.

attention to its undesirable relationship with prowess, and the extent to which Gawain must forgo honour in the pursuit of what is morally right.[51] For Putter, the beheading game requires Gawain to abandon the codes of honour that are devised for martial pursuits, first by attacking an unarmed opponent, and then by submitting himself to attack without the ability to defend himself. Gawain's determination to fulfil his promise to the Green Knight is thus driven by conscience rather than honour: a belief that he must keep to the terms of the beheading game, no matter the consequences. Here, Putter identifies a connection with Boethian philosophy that emphasises conscience over life and honour. For Boethius, 'happiness depends on the willingness to renounce the gifts of fortune and to disregard the opinions of others for the greater good of inner conviction'.[52] In a very literal sense, then, the gift of fortune awarded to Gawain by Lady Bertilak – the girdle that protects its wearer from harm (1851-4) – is not as beneficial to Gawain as his faith in the 'right' path.

By accepting the girdle, Gawain effectively highlights an unresolved point of tension between spiritual and secular ideals. Whilst knights are rewarded with glory for completing honourable deeds, such rewards hold no value after death. In *Sir Gawain*, this raises the question as to whether something honourable is worth doing if there are no witnesses to convert that honour into glory, and no way for Gawain to return to the court to make an account of his deeds. For Laura Ashe, the threat of death in *Sir Gawain* distinguishes the poem from other romance tales, and even from earlier iterations of the beheading game motif.[53]

[51] Ad Putter, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and French Arthurian Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), pp. 170-2.

[52] Ibid, pp. 151-2.

[53] Laura Ashe, 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Limits of Chivalry', pp. 167-72. The earliest example of the beheading game motif can be found in *Fled Bricrend* (*The Feast of Bricriu*), an Ulster Cycle tale that dates from the eighth century and survives in its earliest form in the twelfth century Lebor na hUidre (Book of the Dun Cow). Elizabeth Brewer, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1973), pp. 18-23.

Romance heroes are not supposed to die within the bounds of their own romance, and yet for most of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* the hero believes that he is journeying toward his end. In light of this, Ashe argues that the *Gawain*-poet exploits the beheading game device 'as a means of exposing the emptiness at the core of the chivalric project'.[54] The implied outcome of the Green Knight's game (Gawain's beheading) effectively challenges the heroic expectations of the chivalric ideal by offering Gawain a meaningless death leagues away from any witnesses to his deeds. With no one to take account of his actions, Gawain's bravery loses much of its value. The *Gawain*-poet thus draws attention to the limits of the chivalric ideal and the conflicting ideologies of chivalry and Christianity that exist in tension throughout the poem. For Ashe, Gawain's failure lies in his reliance on chivalric, rather than Christian, ideologies in the poem's final test. Had he refused the girdle and given himself over to God – as he claims to do on line 2158 ('To Godes wille I am ful bayn') – then he would have survived the trial completely unscathed.[55]

The conclusions reached by Putter and Ashe draw attention to the difficulty that Gawain faces in combining secular ideals of honour and chivalry with an Augustinian belief in faith as immaterial and unrelated to earthly concerns. However, both arguments also imply that it is obvious which course of action Gawain should take. Instead, I would argue that the presence of the faerie sign in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* purposefully inhibits both Gawain's and the audience's ability to identify the 'right' path. In particular, the uncertain position that faeries inhabit on a spectrum running from good to evil is exploited throughout the poem in order to challenge Gawain's certainty in his convictions. Thus, the poet can hint at Hautdesert's sudden appearance in the forest as evidence of divine intervention, whilst at

[54] Ashe, p. 164.

[55] Ibid, pp. 171-2.

other times drawing attention to the possibility of demonic interference. When Gawain first sees the Green Chapel – which is described as 'A balwe berwe by a bonk the brymme biside' [the bulge of a barrow by a cliff beside the water's edge] (2172)[56] – he declares it to be an abode of the devil and fears that he has been misled by some illusion (2187-8).

The ambiguous faerie elements of the poem are, I would argue, intended to highlight the difficulty of Gawain's choices. For many critics, Gawain's concealment of the girdle during his confession to a priest – an event that takes place immediately prior to his final encounter with the Green Knight – is his most egregious sin (1876-9).[57] However, the implications of this oversight on Gawain's part are not entirely clear. Indeed, as Derek Brewer observes, the existence of Gawain's second, secular confession in front of the Green Knight cultivates a certain amount of ambiguity surrounding the status of Christian penitential practice within *Sir Gawain*.[58] For Brewer, this second admission raises a question as to whether Gawain's confession to the priest is made invalid through his concealment of the girdle: a question that is never fully answered in the poem itself. Gawain certainly thinks of himself as a failure, but he locates that failure in his foolishness for succumbing to the 'wyles of wymmen' (2415). Conversely, Arthur and his court celebrate Gawain's return because, in chivalric terms, he has achieved everything that was expected of him with only minor infractions along the way: he has survived the trial, resisted temptation, and shown great courage in the process. Even by the poem's conclusion, then, the *Gawain*-poet maintains a degree of uncertainty regarding the exact nature of Gawain's success or failure. Gawain errs in his decision to accept the green

[56] Translation taken in full from Putter and Stokes' note to lines 2171-2.

[57] The significance of confessional practices in *Sir Gawain* was influentially discussed in J. A. Burrow's *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, pp. 104-11, 127-59. See also, W. R. J. Barron, *Trawthe and Treason* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980).

[58] Derek Brewer, 'Romance Traditions and Christian Values in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England*, p. 150-60.

girdle, but the poem leaves us in some doubt as to what ramifications this will have (if any) for Gawain's future.

The uncertainty of Gawain's fate thus forms part of a larger pattern within the poem in which Gawain is continually presented with choices that highlight the many contradictions and complications that exist within the chivalric ideal. In Hautdesert, for example, Gawain is placed in the unusual position of remaining in bed while Bertilak and his men go out hunting. Gawain agrees to do this out of respect for his host's hospitality, but this decision results in a further complication when Lady Bertilak visits his bedchamber while the hunting party is abroad. In this respect, *Sir Gawain* closely resembles the chivalric romances that emerged in France two centuries earlier. Gawain's encounter with the otherworldly castle of Hautdesert and its inhabitants instigates a process of self-discovery in which the hero must attempt to amalgamate competing ideas about hospitality, knighthood, and sexual conduct into a single, unified whole. However, Gawain's path is also more obscure than in these earlier examples. As Putter and Stokes have argued, the poet demonstrates a sophisticated awareness of romance convention that signals his understanding of the mode, but also his ability to manipulate its ideals and values to his own ends.[59] As such, we are asked to re-evaluate our expectations concerning the nature of Gawain's test.

Within the context of this uncertainty, the *Gawain*-poet's use of the ambiguous faerie sign allows him to show sympathy for Gawain's predicament whilst ultimately not excusing him for his failings. The Green Knight tests Gawain by presenting him with something unknowable: something immortal and outside the realms of divine law. Through this narrative structure, the *Gawain*-poet draws attention to Gawain's mortality and, more importantly, his

[59] Putter and Stokes, pp. 247-56.

misplaced fear of death. As Gawain himself declares, the green girdle becomes a reminder of the frailty of humankind and the ease with which humans can fall into sin (2435-6). As Burrow argues, Gawain is assigned a part 'in the "universal drama" of sin and penance, death and judgement'.[60] However, his journey toward self-discovery is also fraught with contradictions and complications along the way. In particular, the *Gawain*-poet highlights the complex relationship that exists between Gawain's spiritual development and competing notions of honour and prowess that form a central part of the chivalric ideal. The ambiguous faerie sign serves as a useful means of identifying this complexity.

The faerie landscapes of *Pearl*

If the *Gawain*-poet blends elements of Christian orthodoxy with the faerie sign in his romance, then the influence of the faerie sign might also be seen in one of his more spiritual works. *Pearl*, a poem about a man mourning the death of his daughter, stands apart from the chivalric contexts in which we traditionally see faeries and the secular otherworld appearing. Instead, the poem takes the form of a dream vision in which the poet draws heavily on imagery taken from Scripture, particularly Revelation, for his representation of the otherworld. The most striking example of this is the account of New Jerusalem, which the poet derives almost exclusively from 'the apostel John' (984). The city is built on twelve foundations, each made from a different type of precious stone, with twelve gates adorning

[60] Burrow, p. 183. Here, Burrow is developing his argument from Northrop Frye's definitions of fictional modes. Frye argues that Christianity's presence in literature often corresponds with that of the 'low mimetic mode': in other words, its function is to generate a sense of community between hero and audience. Through this, the heroes of the 'romantic' or 'high mimetic' modes are made more relatable; the author downplays their superhuman abilities in favour of a more individual, psychological approach. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 33-52.

its outer wall (992-4, 1034-5); the interior is perfectly proportioned, stretching for twelve furlongs in every direction (1030-1); and the entire city is paved with gold and emits a light bright enough that 'Of sunne ne mone had they no nede' (1045).[61] In the dreamer's vision of New Jerusalem, he sees a hundred thousand virgin brides of Christ, each dressed in white and adorned with pearls (1099-108), and at their head he sees the Lamb of God with seven horns of red and gold, sitting on the throne of Heaven and bleeding from a wound close to his heart (1110-3, 1135-7).[62]

In addition to this heavy dependence on scriptural imagery, the poet's confident grasp of doctrinal and scholastic teachings is evident throughout the poem. The *Gawain*-poet likely drew on a wide range of sources as his inspiration for *Pearl*, including contemporary theological treatises on the doctrine of grace, Latin and vernacular devotional writing, and possibly even Dante's *Divine Comedy*, although evidence for the latter is more uncertain.[63] Furthermore, as Cecilia Hatt has suggested, the poem may draw inspiration from the Beatitudes of *Matthew* 5:3-10 (as both *Patience* and *Cleanness* do).[64] In this respect, *Pearl*'s engagement with the doctrine of grace is drawn out in specifically scriptural terms through an examination of the text 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted' (4).

However, whilst *Pearl* is primarily concerned with establishing certain eschatological truths, it is also a poem that draws attention to the inadequacy of human discourse on these

[61] For an account of the significance of the number twelve in *Revelation* and its impact on medieval descriptions of otherworldly settings, see Ad Putter, 'The influence of visions of the otherworld on some medieval romances', in *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Carolyn Muessig and Ad Putter (London: Routledge, 2007), 237-51, p. 241.

[62] The reference to 'Hundred thousandes' in line 1107 of *Pearl* refers to the one hundred and forty-four thousand virgin followers of Christ described in *Revelation* 14:4. See Putter and Stokes, p. 461, n. 1107.

[63] A. C. Spearing, *The Gawain-Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 14-18. The *Gawain*-poet's familiarity with Dante's work has been debated extensively, but these arguments remain largely speculative. For a recent appraisal of this debate, see Hatt, pp. 226-8.

[64] Hatt, pp. 16-21.

truths. Thus, as J. Stephen Russell has observed, the poem is filled with moments that are intended to confound or to draw attention to their own irregularity.[65] The pearl-maiden's explanation regarding her status as Queen of Heaven, for example, explicitly addresses the limitations entailed in our tendency to conceive of the divine in corporeal terms. Here, the dreamer's confusion regarding the pearl-maiden's position in Heaven is based largely on his interpretation of the heavenly kingdom in terms of secular, earthly governance:

> Displeses not if I speke errour.
> Art thou the queen of hevens blue
> That all this world schall do honour?
> We leven on Mary, that grace of grewe,
> That bere a barn of vyrgyn flour;
> The crowne fro her who might remue,
> But ho her passed in sum favour?
>
> (422-8)

> Do not be displeased if I speak in error: Are you the blue-clad Queen of Heaven whom all the world must honour? We believe in Mary, who bore a child of grace from the flower of her virginity. What person could remove the crown from her, unless that person surpassed her in some exceptional way?

[65] J. Stephen Russell, *The English Dream Vision* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988), p. 164.

The dreamer cannot conceive of his daughter holding a position in Heaven that rivals Mary's. However, whilst we recognise his mistake in ascribing earthly parameters to the notion of queenship, we are also able to sympathise with his misunderstanding. Indeed, as Russell argues, the entire poem serves to draw attention to our inability to think of the divine in anything other than corporeal terms.[66]

It is this exploration of the limits of human comprehension that opens up the possibility of the poet's engagement with the faerie sign in *Pearl*. Here, as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the poet is blurring secular and spiritual ideas in a way that identifies their complex relationship in medieval thought. As such, and in addition to the imagery derived from scripture, the *Gawain*-poet employs motifs that originate from Celtic otherworldly tradition in order to intentionally disorient his audience, particularly in the earlier stages of the poem.

Traces of the faerie sign's presence in *Pearl* can be seen most clearly in the descriptions of landscape within the dream vision. The extreme and unusual beauty of the setting – the 'crystal clyffes' (74), the purple trees with leaves of 'burnist sylver' (76-7), the riverbed lined with gems and beryl (109-20), and the 'precious perles' that cover the ground beneath the dreamer's feet (82) – might refer to either a paradisiacal or faerie otherworld. Likewise, the abundant fruit, brightly coloured birds, and music that surround the dreamer could be Edenic or they might derive from Celtic mythological tradition.[67] The point here seems to be that the poet is intentionally combining traditions, making it difficult for his

[66] Russell, p. 174.

[67] For an account of the Christian symbolic meaning of birds and song in Early Irish voyage narratives, see Patch, *The Other World*, pp. 54-5.

audience to distinguish between the two. For example, the description of the tree of life found in Revelation –

> In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river,
> was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits,
> and yielded her fruit every month[.]
>
> (Rev. 22:2)

– is reproduced in *Pearl* in the following lines:

> Aboute that water are tres ful schym,
> That twelve fruytes of lif con bere ful sone:
> Twelve sythes on yere thay beren ful frym,
> And renowles new in uch a mone.
>
> (1077-80)

> The trees beside the stream are the brightest and very quickly bear fruits that sustain life: they grow plump and ready for harvest twelve times a year, renewing with each new moon.

The solitary tree of life that appears in Scripture is here replaced with an orchard of fruit trees that more closely resembles the otherworldly garden found in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*, or the islands of plenty associated with Celtic mythology. Thus, whilst the description of New

Jerusalem in *Pearl* derives from the Apocalypse of St John, 'the inspiration for the dream landscapes seems to have as much to do with fairy worlds as with the Bible'.[68]

The stream that separates the dreamer from the pearl maiden also exhibits certain traits that associate it with both scripture and the secular otherworlds of romance. On the one hand, the stream operates as a clear boundary between the dream landscape that can be traversed by the dreamer on its near side, and the inaccessible vision of New Jerusalem that appears on the far bank. The stream's significance as a component of the poem's religious didacticism thus relates to the function it plays as a metaphorical boundary between heavenly and corporeal understanding. For Putter and Stokes, the dreamer's inability to transition from this brief vision of the heavenly realm to entering within its walls relates to his continued reliance on the same 'mortal priorities and impulses' that have guided him from the beginning of the dream.[69] His limited insight prevents him from achieving a greater knowledge of the divine, and so he immediately wakes from the dream when he attempts to traverse its waters (1170).

At the same time, the stream resembles the kinds of liminal settings that constitute a boundary between faerie land and the mortal realm in many romance sources. As in Marie de France's *Lanval* or the anonymous *Thomas of Erceldoune*, the stream in *Pearl* marks the point at which our world and the otherworld come into contact: the point where encounters with supernatural characters most frequently occur. Its symbolic function thus helps to alert the audience to the different realities that exist on either side of the stream, even before the

[68] Cooper, 'The Supernatural', p. 284. Cooper also suggests that the description of a city which can only be entered by individuals who are pure of heart (971-2) resembles the kind of supernatural tests found in Arthurian legends, 'such as the drinking-horn devised by Morgan le Fay that spills wine on a woman of less than perfect chastity, or the ship that can only be entered by those of perfect faith' (p. 285).

[69] Putter and Stokes, p. 21.

dreamer has attempted to cross it. At the same time, the dreamer is also already in a supernatural landscape filled with strange and unnatural things. The crystal cliffs and purple trees that adorn his side of the river are intentionally dreamlike or otherworldly. The poet uses these unusual features as a means of cultivating ambiguity, making it difficult for us to know how to make sense of the setting. As such, when the dreamer first encounters the stream in the early stages of his vision, both he and we are unsure whether he is witnessing a paradisiacal landscape or something closer to faerie land.

The description of the daughter's beauty in *Pearl* also has some clear similarities to the descriptions of faerie maidens found throughout romance. The maiden is dressed in a 'Blysnande [gleaming] white' mantle (163), her hair is like 'glysnande [glistening] gold' (165) and, similar to the description of the Green Knight's bejewelled clothes in *Sir Gawain*, her clothing is decorated with many pearls (197-206). The poet also describes the dreamer's daughter as a 'mayden of mensk [honour/kindness], ful debonere [courteous]' (162). The poet's portrayal of the pearl maiden thus incorporates a set of values and visual cues that resembles descriptions of the courtly elite in romance. As with many faerie characters, the maiden represents a superlative example of courtly femininity.[70] Indeed, whilst she has been stripped of the sexuality that is usually associated with faeries, her function is similar: she is an arbiter of human action, challenging the mortal figure who has ventured into her realm.[71] As A. C. Spearing has argued, the dreamer doesn't emerge from the vision entirely cured of his grief, but the pearl maiden's wisdom and the vision he is granted of New Jerusalem have

[70] Putter and Stokes draw attention to the description of the maiden's outfit in this passage as evoking a kind of ceremonial costume worn by ladies of rank during the fourteenth century (p. 32, nn. 197-204).

[71] For Helen Cooper, the maiden's appearance relates to faerie figures such as Tryamour in *Sir Launfal*, but her role is the reverse of a traditional faerie lover, turning the protagonist's love away from herself and toward Christ ('The Supernatural', pp. 284-5).

brought him to a point where he can begin to reconcile his loss and relinquish his pearl to God.[72] In the final stanzas of the poem, we understand that he has submitted himself (and his pearl) to God's will: 'Lord, mad hit are that agayns thee stryven' (1199).

For John Finlayson, the appropriation of certain romance conventions into *Pearl* thus represents part of an intentional rhetorical strategy intended to shape the dreamer's progression toward a greater comprehension of divine grace. He argues that the skill of the poet lies in his ability to keep both the narrator and the reader in suspense about the otherworldly setting, and even when the maiden is first revealed, her exact identity and the true nature of the poem remain unclear.[73] Our understanding of the mysterious landscape thus develops in line with the dreamer's, as the lessons imparted by the pearl-maiden gradually reveal more about herself and about their surroundings. However, as the description of the many trees of life demonstrates, the dreamer's comprehension of divine truth remains impeded by the earthly (or in this case literary) signifiers that he is unable to separate himself from. Returning once again to the argument made by J. Stephen Russell, the appearance of ambiguous otherworldly signifiers throughout *Pearl* serves as a constant reminder of the limits of the human mind in relation to God. Whilst the identity of the pearl maiden and her position in heaven has been revealed by the poem's conclusion, themes and motifs associated with the faerie sign remind us that our ability to interpret God's will is limited and must therefore come through divine revelation. Without the information provided by the pearl maiden, the dreamer would remain oblivious of the exact nature of the otherworldly vision.

[72] A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 128.

[73] John Finlayson, '*Pearl*: Landscape and Vision', *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 71, 3 (1974), p. 331.

Unlike *Sir Gowther* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, then, the poet's appropriation of the faerie sign in *Pearl* is intended to contrast with, rather than be assimilated into, the doctrinal elements of the poem. Here, the poet seems to imply that the tendency to imagine faeries within an otherworldly context is almost an inevitable part of our limited human understanding – an indication of how deeply imbedded faeries were within the medieval consciousness – but also that it is a tendency that must be rejected and ultimately moved past. We perceive faerie allusions as a destabilising element within the poem, one that works in opposition to the otherworldly descriptions that derive from Scripture, but also one that does not conform to the typical demonic definitions of faeries in medieval clerical writing. Within the context of the poem, faerie signifiers function as an indication of both the dreamer's and the reader's inability to fully understand heaven and the nature of the divine being. As such, this chapter argues that the faerie sign in *Pearl* serves as a useful means of exploring complex theological issues related to the limits of human comprehension. Like the examples of *Sir Gowther* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, themes and motifs attributed to faeries within *Pearl* draw into question the notion that faeries are only used to comment on secular ideals and the pursuit of earthly rewards.

The three texts explored in this chapter therefore demonstrate that, whilst faeries were often perceived by Church authorities as either false idols or demonic manifestations, this did not prevent faeries from being used in a literary context to develop ideas drawn from Christian theology. Furthermore, these texts demonstrate the absence of a clear divide between secular and spiritual forms of medieval literature in modern critical thought. In *Sir Gowther*, for instance, the poet simplifies the complex relationship that exists between faeries and questing knights in similar works of romance literature in order to tell a story

centred around the hero's development from sin toward a state of grace. There, the poet's adaptation of motifs related to the faerie sign represents a clear appropriation of romance convention for the purposes of religious didacticism. However, in the works of the *Gawain*-poet, the use of the faerie sign to evoke religious meaning becomes more nuanced. In both *Sir Gawain* and *Pearl*, faeries, as beings that represent the limits of human comprehension, provide a useful means of considering the protagonists' earthly limitations. In *Sir Gawain*, this limitation comes in the form of conflict between secular and spiritual ideals and the protagonist's inability to reconcile a martial, honour-driven lifestyle with one of religious piety. Whereas in *Pearl*, it is the protagonist's inability to conceive of heaven itself that is expressed through the presence of the faerie sign.

Moving away from the Middle Ages, the next chapter will examine the way that faeries are used to develop religious ideas in a Protestant, Elizabethan context. In Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, faeries are conceived of in very different terms to those found in medieval romance, and yet even in this example, ambiguity and the themes and motifs of the faerie sign play an important part in the cultivation of meaning within the text. There, as in the examples explored in this chapter, the author's engagement with the faerie sign forms part of a dialogue with existing literary convention as it is shaped to cultivate new meaning.

Chapter Four:

Spenser and the Diversification of Faeries

Spenser's 'delightfull land of Faery' (VI.Proem.1) is a complicated and multifaceted literary terrain. It is a space without clear borders, with no sense of scale or measurable distance between distinguishable landmarks, and with no consistency in terms of the ontology of its inhabitants. It is also a landscape that proves difficult to locate geographically. Faerie land appears to share a border with King Arthur's Britain, across which respective inhabitants are able to pass, but it is also, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge declared, a space that embodies the 'marvellous independence and true imaginative absence of all particular space or time', an entirely 'mental space'.[1]

In one sense, then, the faerie land of Spenser's poem adheres quite closely to the otherworldly landscapes of medieval romance. Gloriana's kingdom sits on the borders of the natural world, accessible through Britomart's 'straunge aduenture' (III.i.8) or Redcrosse's kidnapping by a 'base Elfin brood' (I.x.65), whilst simultaneously existing outside of the time and space inhabited by Spenser and his audience.[2] In its status as a realm apart from the world of its composition, but also a location accessible through travel, faerie land mirrors various examples of medieval otherworlds from *Immram Brain* and *Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed*, to the worlds conjured by Walter Map's account of King Herla in *De Nugis Curialium*, by *Sir Orfeo*,

[1] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (London: Constable, 1936), p. 36.

[2] Michael Murrin suggests that Spenser took his defence of faerie land as an actual space from Jean d'Arras' *Melusine*. For Murrin, both Jean's and Spenser's claims border on the absurd, but their lack of logical argument is made up for by their rhetorical purpose. Speaking of Spenser, he writes, 'The poet tantalizes his audience. He wants us to wonder about faery, to search for its traces' (p. 77). See Michael Murrin, 'The Rhetoric of Fairyland', in *The Rhetoric of Renaissance Poetry From Wyatt to Milton*, ed. by Thomas O. Sloan and Raymond B. Waddington (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 73-95.

and by *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*. Similarly, the uncertain landscapes of Spenser's faerie realm are reminiscent of the topography of Chrétien de Troyes' Arthurian romances or Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. In both Chrétien and Malory, natural and artificial landmarks feature as the only distinguishable geographical markers in an otherwise vague and dreamlike world with no clear sense of spatial relativity.

However, despite drawing heavily on the conventions of romance to shape his 'famous antique history' (II.Proem.1), Spenser's poem also differs from its medieval predecessors in a number of significant ways. First and foremost, Spenser, perhaps uniquely amongst romance writers, sets his poem predominantly within the borders of faerie land, with only brief moments of analepsis and exposition to help situate its relationship to Britain. Traditionally, journeys into the otherworld in romance form just one part of the heroic quest narrative, with the bulk of the story taking place within the natural world or within the liminal settings that mark the uncertain boundary between realms. Spenser does not operate in this way: at the beginning of Book I, we are already in Gloriana's faerie realm, and whilst the narrator may speak to us from somewhere beyond the borders of faerie land – as evidenced by the description given in the proem to Book II and in Spenser's explanatory letter to Raleigh – Spenser's poem remains focused on events that transpire within this otherworldly setting.

Secondly, the faerie knights and ladies of Gloriana's kingdom are essentially indistinguishable in appearance from the human Britons who also inhabit Spenser's world. To some extent, this has always been true of romance faeries, who frequently resemble lavish facsimiles of their aristocratic human counterparts. However, Spenser's faeries do not function as moral arbiters – challenging or upholding the social, ethical, and moral codes of questing knights – in quite the same way as, for example, Arawn in *Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed* or Lord and Lady Bertilak in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Instead, many of Spenser's faeries

are perhaps more closely related to the protagonists of romance. There is, after all, very little (in terms of appearance or action) to distinguish Guyon, a 'Faerie knight' (II.i.17) who is 'Elfin borne' (II.i.6), from human characters such as Redcrosse, Britomart, and Artegall. Guyon, as much as any of his human counterparts, is subject to the conventions and expectations of heroic quest narratives, including journeys through liminal landscapes (forests, caves, islands), tests of martial ability, and encounters with supernatural antagonists intended to challenge his moral resolve.

At the same time, the inhabitants of Gloriana's realm vary significantly in terms of their visual aesthetic and their intended function within the poem's allegory. Spenser draws heavily on the conventions of medieval Arthurian tradition throughout his poem, but it is also an amalgam of different influences that incorporates elements of, among other things, classical epic, Italian romance epic, Elizabethan propaganda, Aristotelian moral virtues, Humanist discourse, and Reformist (specifically Calvinist) doctrine. Likewise, his faerie characters are derived from a variety of different sources, some resembling powerful Roman deities or classical nature spirits, some demonstrating an association with Christian saints, and some embodying contemporary politico-religious ideas concerning demonic illusion. Identifying instances of the faerie sign in Spenser's work is therefore complicated by the fact that Spenser frequently subverts our expectations by intentionally blurring both the ontology and function of faeries within his imagined faerie realm.

It is by attempting to broaden our understanding of what constitutes a faerie within *The Faerie Queene* that this chapter differs most notably from previous critical discussions on the topic. For the most part, these arguments have tended to focus solely on those faeries who resemble the medieval knights and courtly ladies of the Arthurian tradition. By doing so, they risk reducing the complexity of Spenser's faerie realm and downplaying the range of

different meanings that appear in conjunction with his central allegory. By point of contrast, my own argument offers a study of specific figures within the terrain of Spenser's faerie land that draws on the methodologies of critics who have explored the terrain itself. For example, as Tamsin Badcoe has argued, Spenser's exploitation of the versatile liminal spaces within faerie land invites an appreciation of the complexity of his setting and the means by which meaning is constructed and continually reshaped.[3] The close relationship that exists between faeries and liminality in the landscapes of romance suggests that a similar level of complexity may also exist in relation to Spenser's faerie characters. Tracing a line of Spenser criticism that has worried over the ontology of Spenser's faerie characters, this chapter will draw attention to two key aspects of the faerie sign's important role in constructing meaning within the poem. Firstly, I will explore how Spenser's subversion of the faerie sign allows him to separate out potentially harmful interpretations of faeries from those that are used to glorify the image of his sovereign. And secondly, I will examine how the uncertainty cultivated by Spenser's faeries places the reader in a position similar to that of the chivalric heroes of romance: engaging them in a process of interpretation concerning the exact nature of the otherworldly setting that is ultimately intended to aid in the construction of an idealised image of courtly virtue. However, before coming to either of those points, this chapter will consider, in a little more detail, some of the existing critical arguments concerning the nature of Spenser's faeries, as well as some of the different ways that faeries were conceived by Spenser's contemporaries.

[3] Tamsin Badcoe, *Edmund Spenser and the Romance of Space* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

Critical approaches to Spenser's faerie land

Critical approaches to the topic of Spenser's faerie land have tended to focus on its function within the context of the poem's central allegory.[4] This approach is largely informed by the explanation that Spenser himself provides in his *Letter to Raleigh*, in which he directly alludes to the allegorical connection between Elizabeth and the faerie queen:

> In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceiue the most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faery land.
>
> (32-4)

In Spenser's own words, then, the poem serves to venerate Elizabeth's body politic by associating her with an idealised image of female sovereignty derived primarily from the conventions of romance. As with similar female faerie figures explored throughout this thesis (i.e. the inhabitants of the Land of Women, Rhiannon, and Lanval's faerie lover), Gloriana is defined as a superlative example of beauty, wealth, and power, and a figure capable of exhibiting a degree of authority and control over the patriarchal society of the court. However, by emulating a version of Elizabeth's kingdom in his imagined faerie realm, Spenser also establishes his intention to use the poem as something akin to an instruction manual for

[4] See, for example, Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery*; and Marco Nievergelt, *Allegorical Quests* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2012). For a broad appraisal of critical approaches to Spenser's virtues, see A. C. Hamilton's 'General Introduction' to *The Faerie Queene*, pp. 5-8.

the educated elite of Elizabethan courtly society. He states that *The Faerie Queene*'s purpose is to 'fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline', using the history of King Arthur as a 'plausible and pleasing' conceit through which to cultivate meaning (8-9).[5] In this way, Arthur's adventures in Gloriana's kingdom act as an allegorical framework within which Spenser is able to develop his understanding of courtly virtue: faerie land effectively becomes the romance-inspired backdrop to the primary political and didactic purposes of the poem.[6]

Whilst Spenser's interpretation of the function of faerie land helps to develop our understanding of the poem's allegory, it has also resulted in a number of critics attempting to explain away the various discrepancies and inconsistencies that exist within the poet's use of the term 'Faery'. For instance, the early-twentieth-century critic Edwin Greenlaw drew particular attention to the propagandistic value of Spenser's faerie land as symbolising a connection between the Tudor dynasty and the ancient British kings.[7] For Greenlaw, Spenser's faerie land can be divided between landscapes that represent an allegorical version of England, and landscapes that draw more heavily on Celtic otherworldly tradition. The latter's connection to the early Welsh roots of the King Arthur legend thus helps to establish Arthur's adventures in *The Faerie Queene* as a precursor to his legacy as King of Britain and, subsequently, as a precursor to the reign of the Tudor monarchs as well. However, whilst

[5] Had Spenser completed his work, the twelve sections of *The Faerie Queene* would have dealt with the 'twelue priuate morall vertues' of the ideal Elizabethan gentleman (*Letter to Raleigh*, 20). Of those twelve sections, only six were ever completed: holiness, temperance, chastity, friendship, justice, and courtesy.

[6] The two primary allegorical functions of Spenser's faerie land can also be seen in his description of the two chronicles found in canto x of Book II. Here, the 'rolls of Elfin Emperours' and the 'chronicle of Briton kings' draw attention to the duality of faerie land as both an idealised mirror image of the Tudor court (in which Henry Tudor, Henry VIII, and Elizabeth are represented as the elfin rulers Elficleos, Oberon, and Tanaquill), and as the setting for Arthur's adventures which form part of our own chronological history.

[7] Edwin Greenlaw, 'Spenser's Fairy Mythology', in *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 15, 2 (1918), pp. 105-22.

Greenlaw acknowledges that Spenser engages extensively with a wide range of different sources and influences, his allusions to the Celtic otherworld often feel over-emphasised in order to validate their function as part of Spenser's propagandistic model for the poem. For example, Greenlaw compares the biblical figure Mammon to the leprechauns of Irish mythology, and Mammon's cave to the Welsh otherworld of Annwn, tenuously associating the cauldrons of molten gold in Mammon's lair with the Celtic cauldron of plenty found in tales such as *Preiddeu Annwn* (*The Spoils of Annwn*).

Similarly, whilst Isabel Rathborne's *The Meaning of Spenser's Fairyland* (1937) still represents one of the most thorough investigations into Spenser's use of faeries to date, her argument focuses almost entirely on the importance of 'historical fiction' as the driving force behind the construction of meaning within the poem.[8] Rathborne identifies Spenser's faerie realm as comparable with the classical Elysium, a landscape with a single and precisely situated terrain in which figures from different periods of history can interact at leisure. Within this context, Spenser's faeries appear as human figures: 'ancestors of noble families, men and women of superior intelligence and virtue, who were therefore credited by the superstitious and ignorant of past ages with a supernatural origin'.[9] Their function is determined by the role that Gloriana's kingdom plays in mirroring an idealised image of the Elizabethan court and in supporting the ancestral legacy of the Tudor dynasty. However, in attempting to map out faerie land in its entirety, Rathborne struggles to explain the more

[8] Isabel E. Rathborne, *The Meaning of Spenser's Fairyland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), p. 157.

[9] Ibid, p. 172. Rathborne relates Spenser's allegory to works of medieval literature that establish a faerie character or mythical hero as the progenitor of a real-world aristocratic family. In Jean d'Arras' *Mélusine*, for instance, the story of a Lamia (half snake, half woman) who marries a French nobleman is framed as an ancestral origin for the House of Lusignan in Poitou. Likewise, in the Old French Crusade Cycle, the crusader Godfrey de Bouillon is made the descendent of an otherworldly swan knight. In both cases, the marvellous elements of the story serve to enhance the reputation of the family or person in question, granting them an almost mythical status by association.

incongruous instances of faerie usage within the poem, such as the changeling narratives of the human knights Redcrosse and Artegall. Here, she draws a distinction between the 'true faeries' who represent the souls of virtuous past heroes, and the 'false faeries' who symbolise the spirits of evil men and servants of the Devil.[10] In this respect, the stealing away of Redcrosse and Artegall is transformed into a devilish act in which the figures of true holiness and justice are taken from their rightful place in Britain. However, Rathborne is never fully able to justify why those characters should end up in a realm of the famous dead. Nor is it particularly clear as to what distinguishes a true faerie from a false one in this interpretation of Spenser's faerie kingdom.

Another critic who has built on arguments that emphasise the human nature of Spenser's faeries is Sverre Arestad, who suggests that the word 'faery' in *The Faerie Queene* has little to do with the supernatural.[11] Instead, he argues that 'faery' refers to a reimagined England filled with 'faery knights' and a 'faery queene' on purely allegorical terms. Characters such as Guyon are not genuine faeries because they show no real indication of supernatural or otherworldly ability. The 'faery knights' of Spenser's world thus act in much the same way as do the knights of Briton: they are the receivers and partakers of quests rather than otherworldly beings who inhabit the liminal spaces of Spenser's faerie land. In light of this, Arestad criticises scholars such as Greenlaw for associating Spenser's faerie characters with the 'Celtic' otherworlds found in the woods and caves of faerie land. As he sees it, 'Spenser's Faery people represent the English nation' and nothing more.[12]

[10] Rathborne, pp. 201-2.

[11] Sverre Arestad, 'Spenser's Faery and Fairy', *Modern Language Quarterly*, Vol. 8, 1 (1947), p. 37.

[12] Ibid, p. 41. Another critic who has attempted to distinguish Spenser's faerie land as a space entirely devoted to allegory is Wayne Erickson, who argues that Spenser adopts a multiform approach to both literary modes and landscapes within his poem. For Erickson, faerie land, a setting associated with romance and allegory,

For critics such as Greenlaw, Arestad, and Rathborne, then, the landscapes of Spenser's faerie land may be structured through imagery derived from Celtic otherworldly tradition, but the inhabitants of that realm have been broadly (or entirely) humanised in order to conform with Spenser's propagandistic and didactic agenda. However, these arguments are unable to account for the diverse range of characters and beings that we encounter within Spenser's faerie realm. Nor do they consider the extent to which Spenser may have been influenced by additional external factors while developing his understanding of what constituted a faerie. In contrast, critics interested in the historiographical and anthropological significance of faeries have argued that the early modern period marks an important turning point in relation to their use as literary signifiers.[13] As such, and in order better to understand Spenser's faerie land, it is worth briefly considering how its inhabitants relate to a wider diversification of the faerie sign in early modern culture.

Spenser's framing of *The Faerie Queene* as an Arthurian quest narrative suggests that his understanding of the term 'Faery' owes a significant debt to the conventions and motifs of the faerie sign as it appears in medieval romance. Many critics, for instance, have drawn attention to Chaucer's *Tale of Sir Thopas* as the primary inspiration for Arthur's quest to find Gloriana in *The Faerie Queene*. Despite an incongruity between the parodic nature of Chaucer's tale and Spenser's far more serious subject matter, *Thopas* is widely accepted as

stands in contrast to Britain, a landscape that is identified through epic and social-political realism. See *Mapping the Faerie Queene* (London: Garland, 1996), p. 87.

[13] See, for example, Katharine M. Briggs' *The Anatomy of Puck* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), Diane Purkiss' *Troublesome Things* (London: Penguin, 2000), Wendy Wall's *Staging Domesticity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Mary Ellen Lamb's *The Popular Culture of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Jonson* (London: Routledge, 2006), and Regina Buccola's *Fairies, Fractious Women and the Old Faith* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2006).

an example of Spenser's keen (if complex) admiration for his literary predecessor.[14] However, romance also helped to define Spenser's faerie realm in another significant way: through its influence on the pageants and court poetry of the Elizabethan era. During the latter half of the sixteenth century, Elizabeth was the focal point of praise for courtiers who used the language of romance and love poetry to situate her as a figure of adoration from which her subjects could draw inspiration.[15] Through his remaking of Elizabeth as Gloriana, Spenser was therefore participating in a broader cultural movement that incorporated imagery associated with both romance and the classics (particularly figures such as Astraea, Diana, the Vestal Virgins, and the Lady of the Lake) in order to venerate the queen's sovereign power. As Susanne Woods has argued, Elizabeth's courtiers sought to validate her supremacy over them by glorifying her as a courtly lady of romance who inspires and motivates others through her virtue and good character.[16] The dynamic between courtier and queen effectively emulated a typical convention of romance in which heroic knights submitted themselves entirely to the authority of a lover.[17] Accordingly, attempts to portray Elizabeth as a superlative example of

[14] See J. A. Burrow, '*Sir Thopas* in the Sixteenth Century', in *Middle English Studies*, ed. by Douglas Gray and E. G. Stanley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), pp. 69-91; Anne Higgins, 'Spenser Reading Chaucer: Another Look at the *Faerie Queene* Allusions', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 89, 1 (1990), p. 27; and Andrew King, *The Faerie Queene and Middle English Romance* (Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 9-11. For a recent collection on the relationship between Chaucer and Spenser, see Rachel Stenner, Tamsin Badcoe, and Gareth Griffith (eds.), *Rereading Chaucer and Spenser* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

[15] A. C. Hamilton discusses the significance of Petrachan love poetry and its associated emphasis on unattainable desire as integral to the rhetoric of Elizabethan court poetry. He writes, 'As the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth was courted by her courtiers, requiring their love while refusing to satisfy their desire. In her "body natural" she was their Petrarchan mistress: faithful, unconsummated love for her legitamized desire, releasing the creative power of lyric poets by permitting them to explore the state of loving without provoking the charge that they were encouraging lust'. A. C. Hamilton, 'The Renaissance of the Study of the English Literary Renaissance', *ELR*, Vol. 25 (1995), pp. 385-6.

[16] Susanne Woods, 'Spenser and the Problem of Women's Rule', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 48, 2 (1985), p. 149.

[17] This convention is playfully acknowledged in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* through Alyson's suggestion that what women desire most is 'to have sovereynetee / As wel over hir housbond as hir love' (III.1038-40). See also Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Chevalier de la Charrette*, where Lancelot is commanded to lose (and then win) a tournament in order to prove his love for, and utter devotion to, Guinevere (5636-62).

beauty and power inevitably drew associations between her and the autonomous faerie maidens who also populate medieval romance.

The earliest evidence for Elizabeth's association with faeries appears in the records of entertainments held at Kenilworth and Woodstock during the queen's royal progress of 1575.[18] As Jean Wilson has argued, the quest-like nature of the progress, featuring 'journeyings from place to place, pauses to hunt, and supposedly unexpected descents on the local gentry for food and lodging', lent itself particularly well to the trappings of romance. Accordingly,

> Elizabeth's journeyings became fraught with adventure. Satyrs and Wild Men lurked behind every tree, ready to address her in Poulter's Measure. Shepherds and Shepherdesses infested the hills, singing pastoral ditties, and demanding that she arbitrate in their disputes. Strangely familiar Unknown Knights fought in clearings through which she must pass, while Ladies swam in lakes, ready to yield her their sovereignty over the waters.[19]

Within such a context, the figure of the faerie queen became an especially useful symbol of supreme female agency. At Kenilworth, for example, the queen was greeted on her approach to the castle by a performer dressed as the Lady of the Lake who declared, 'The Lake, the

[18] E. K. Chambers argued that the entertainment at Woodstock marked the first appearance of a faerie queen in Elizabethan literature. *Sir Henry Lee* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. 88. C. R. Baskerville makes a similar assertion and even goes so far as to suggest that this may be the genesis of the concept of Elizabeth as the faerie queen. 'The Genesis of Spenser's Fairy Queen', *Modern Philology*, Vol. 18, 1 (1920), pp. 49-54. See also, Matthew Woodcock, 'The Fairy Queen Figure in Elizabethan Entertainments', in *Elizabeth I*, ed. by Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney and Debra Barrett-Graves (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 97-115.

[19] Jean Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1980), p. 42.

Lodge, the Lord, are yours for to command'.[20] The same performer then appeared in a later scene where Elizabeth, by virtue of her virgin purity, rescued the lady from an evil knight named Sir Bruse sans Foy. Here, as Wilson notes, the emphasis on Elizabeth as a saviour associates the queen with the actions of chivalric knights in the heroic quest narratives of romance: she effectively becomes the Arthurian hero of the performance.[21] However, the Lady of the Lake was also clearly intended to reflect some aspect of Elizabeth's sovereignty, as is demonstrated by her handing-over of power at the queen's arrival. Indeed, the comparison being made between the two figures was evidently not lost on Elizabeth, who is reported to have replied indignantly to the lady's gift by declaring 'We thought indeed the Lake had been oours and doo you call it yourz noow? Well, we will herein common more with yoo hereafter'.[22]

Despite this terse response, faeries became a staple of entertainments staged for the queen. As part of the same progress, an entertainment held at Woodstock by Sir Henry Lee incorporated a banquet in which Elizabeth 'was visited by the queen of the Fayry'.[23] Likewise, during the Norwich festivities of 1578, Thomas Churchyard adapted a performance of water nymphs, which had been rained off the previous day, into a scene involving seven faeries who appeared through a hedge, danced, and then presented seven speeches to the queen.[24] And at Elvetham in 1591, the fourth day of entertainment included a dance in a garden led by 'the

[20] John Nichols, *The Progress, and Public Processions, of Queen Elizabeth* (1823). Cited in Wilson, p. 166, n. 9.

[21] Wilson, p. 119.

[22] Ibid, p. 166, n. 9.

[23] Cited in Wilson, p. 121-2.

[24], David M. Bergeron, 'The "I" of the Beholder', in *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, ed. by Jayne Elizabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring, and Sarah Knight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 142-60, pp. 156-7.

Fayery Quene', followed by a song which pleased Elizabeth so much that she 'commaunded to heare it sung and danced three times over'.[25]

The performances at Norwich and Elvetham also draw attention to the versatility of the faerie sign within the context of these royal entertainments. At Elvetham, references to 'Auberon' – a name commonly identified with the king of the faeries in romance[26] – are featured alongside folkloric imagery ('rings of painted flowers') and classical references to figures such as Phoebe and Nereus.[27] Likewise, the interchangeability of faeries and nymphs in the Norwich performance demonstrates the ease with which folkloric faeries and antiquarian supernatural spirits could be conflated. Despite the romance-inspired nature of these performances, the image of faeries that emerges from them is one that derives just as much from classical and folkloric sources as from Arthurian quest narratives.

Faeries in early modern culture

Much more will be said on the subject of folkloric influences on the faerie sign in the next chapter. However, it is worth briefly stating here that developments in drama during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries resulted in faeries becoming increasingly associated with domestic and rural superstition, with the middling sort rather than the aristocratic court, and with deception and con artistry rather than chivalric idealism. In effect, the faeries of the early modern stage began to reflect the influence that a burgeoning middle-

[25] John Wolf, *The Honorable Entertainement gieven to the Queene's Majestie in Progresse, at Elvetham in Hampshire, by the Right Hon'ble the Earle of Hertford, 1591*. Cited in Wilson, pp. 115-6.

[26] This identification of Auberon/Oberon as the king of the faeries derives primarily from the influence and popularity of the thirteenth century *Huon de Bordeaux*. More is said on this topic in the next chapter.

[27] Ibid.

class society was having on the popular literatures and entertainments of the period. Shakespeare, in particular, has been the focus of much critical attention in this regard. Plays such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Winter's Tale* have all been highlighted as examples of Shakespeare's interest in folkloric belief and superstition, most notably in the case of Puck in *Dream*, who represents a version of the domestic hobgoblin Robin Goodfellow.

At the other end of the social spectrum, the tendency to conflate faeries with creatures such as nymphs, satyrs, and fauns became increasingly common during the sixteenth century. This was thanks in part to several English translations of classical works that considered faeries and antiquarian nature spirits to be synonymous. Gavin Douglas' 1513 Scots translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, for example, includes the following lines in which King Evander describes to Aeneas the mythical creatures that once inhabited his land:

> 'Thir woods and thir shaws all', quod he,
> 'Sometime inhabit were and occupyit
> With nymphs and fauns upon every side' –
> Whilk 'fairfolks' or then 'elves' clepin we[.]
>
> (VIII.6.4-7) [28]

Likewise, Arthur Golding's rendering of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* into English in 1567 substitutes nymphs for faeries on a regular basis, and includes lines such as: 'Of all the

[28] Gavin Douglas, *The Aeneid*, ed. by Gordon Kendal, 2 Vols. (London: MHRA, 2011), 1, p. 382.

Nymphes of Nonacris and Fairie farre and neere' (I.859).[29] Whilst an attempt to equate faeries (or faerie-like beings) with figures of Classical pagan worship had existed since the days of Augustine, such accounts remain rare throughout the Middle Ages.[30] Accordingly, these translations of classical works, along with the developing presence of folkloric faeries on the early modern stage, represent an increasing willingness to incorporate ideas surrounding classical mythology and faerie belief into the literatures and entertainments of the period. As with the performances staged for Queen Elizabeth, the blurred boundary between classical, folkloric, and romance sources was becoming an increasingly prevalent aspect of the faerie sign. In Spenser, for example, figures such as Belphoebe represent an amalgamation of both classical and romance influences – Belphoebe's mother is a faerie 'yborne of high degree' (III.vi.4), but she is raised by the goddess Diana (III.vi.28) – whilst the changeling narratives of Redcrosse and Artegall simultaneously draw attention to Spenser's awareness of contemporary folkloric belief.

Spenser was also likely informed by various negative interpretations of faerie belief. For example, one approach adopted by Reformist thinkers of the period was to interpret faeries in Augustinian terms that identified them as demonic manifestations and illusions. Whilst this does not represent a significant departure from what had come before – the previous chapter has discussed accounts of medieval scholars equating faeries with demons – one new aspect to this approach was the extent to which Reformists linked faeries with the false Catholic teachings of the past. Protestantism's renunciation of certain Catholic traditions – i.e. the sacraments, hagiography, processions, Purgatory, and indulgences – effectively

[29] Arthur Golding, *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, ed. by John Frederick Nims (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2000), p. 27. Similar examples of this kind of translation can also be found in dictionaries published during this period. See Woodcock, *Fairies in the Faerie Queene*, p. 17.

[30] Saint Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, XV:23.

resulted in a rejection of any marvel or magical practice that was not directly attributable to God. As such, faeries (along with ghosts and other spirits) were often identified in connection with Catholic heresy.

One frequently cited example of this approach is James VI and I's *Daemonologie* (1597), a work that sought to influence the Scottish judicial system to bring it in line with witch trial practices from mainland Europe (particularly Germany).[31] James argued that faeries did not exist as distinct ontological beings in their own right. Instead, he believed faeries to be demonic illusions that were nonetheless still capable of bringing harm to humans. For example, he writes that,

> To speake of the many vaine trattles founded vpon that illusion: How there was a King and Queene of *Phairie*, of such a iolly court and train as they had, how they had a teynd, & dutie, as it were, of all goods: how they naturallie rode and went, eate and drank, and did all other actiones like natural men and women: I thinke it liker Virgils *Campi Elysij*, nor anie thing that ought to be beleeued by Christians, except in generall, that as I spake sundrie times before, the deuil illuded the senses of sundry simple creatures, in making them beleeue that they saw and harde such things as were nothing so indeed.[32]

[31] See, for example, Latham, pp. 62-3; Briggs, pp. 19-24; Buccola, p. 84; and Woodcock, pp. 24-5

[32] King James VI and I, *Daemonologie*, p. 75.

James thus interpreted faeries as illusions that were brought about by the Devil in an attempt to beguile Christians and turn them from the path of righteousness. However, he also conceded that such delusions had been 'rifest in the time of *Papistrie*'.

This approach is contrasted by the writings of Reginald Scot, whose 1584 publication *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (to which James' *Daemonologie* was a direct response) was aimed at discrediting a belief in the power of witches and supernatural beings to influence human affairs. Like many Protestant reformers of the period, Scot believed that the age of miracles had ended in apostolic times.[33] Thus, whilst he believed in the existence of natural magic within the world – a magic that relied on the 'skilful operation and exploitation of natural causes and effects' – he denied the existence of spiritual or demonic magic.[34] For Scot, magical practices were merely deceptions or acts of cozenage being performed on the unsuspecting and the ignorant.[35] In accordance with this view, faeries were to be considered as non-existent and the products of a vivid imagination. Scot suggests that

> our mothers maids […] have so fraied us with bull beggers, spirits, witches, urchens, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, pans, faunes,

[33] Sydney Anglo suggests that Scot differs slightly from the standard Reformist doctrine of the period in that Scot believes that demonic powers have no sway over human affairs whatsoever. For many reformists, demons still represented a very real threat to humanity, 'capable of trafficking with men' and leading them astray. For example, as Anglo suggests, 'Calvin recognised the dangers of a literal interpretation of the Bible: but his own interpretation still preserved the devil as a potent force in human affairs; and he specifically denied what was central to Scot's thesis - that demons are merely evil impulses'. Sydney Anglo, 'Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*: Scepticism and Sadduceeism', in *The Damned Art*, ed. by Sydney Anglo (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 131.

[34] Anglo, p. 109.

[35] Scot mockingly argued that if witches really did exist, 'we should never have butter in the chearne, nor cow in the close, nor corne in the field, nor faire weather abroad, nor health within doores'. Similarly, 'No prince should be able to reigne or live in the land' as witches would surely have the power to 'destroie all our magistrates' or 'overthrowe an armie roiall' (III.14). It was therefore far more likely that witchcraft served as an excuse or explanation for other things. In the case of men who were supposedly bewitched into having extramarital sex, for example, Scot points out that such witchcraft is practiced 'among manie bad husbands' (IV.5). Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, pp. 36, 45.

> sylens, kit with the cansticke, tritons, centaurs, dwarfes, giants, imps, calcars, conjurors, nymphes, changlings, *Incubus*, Robin good-fellowe, the spoorne, the mare, the man in the oke, the hell waine, the fierdrake, the puckle, Tom thombe, hob gobblin, Tom tumbler, boneless, and such other bugs, that we are afraid of our owne shadows[.]
>
> (VII.15)

Faeries were to be considered part of a fading tradition that had been growing increasingly scarce 'since the preaching of the gospell'. Thus, whilst Scot and James disagree on the threat posed by faeries, they both identify them as creatures (either real or imaginary) that are associated with past belief. Indeed, Scot wryly suggests that, 'in *Germanie*, since *Luthers* time, spirits and devils have not personallie appeared, as in times past they were woont to doo'.

Accounts taken from the Scottish witchcraft trials of the late sixteenth century further illuminate the various competing beliefs surrounding faeries during this period, as well as their susceptibility to manipulation for certain political agendas. James' aggressive stance on witchcraft (at least during the earlier years of his reign) had a widespread impact on attitudes toward faeries in late sixteenth century Scotland.[36] This was particularly true of the Scottish law courts, which often relied on arguments that equated faeries with the devil when dealing with witches who claimed to obtain their powers from faerie familiars. These accounts also help to provide us with an idea of just how widespread the associated conventions of faerie belief were at this time. During the trial of Elizabeth Dunlop of Ayrshire (1576), for example,

[36] Stuart Clark, 'King James's *Daemonologie*', in *The Damned Art*, p. 177.

Dunlop 'confessed that a man called Tom Reid, who had died in battle almost thirty years before, had introduced her to the "good weights" of the "court of Elf-home"'.[37] Dunlop told of how the faerie queen had visited the Ayrshire woman in her home, teaching her to heal with herbs, to see into the future, and to trace lost or stolen goods. Similarly, in 1588, Alison Pearson of Fife claimed that she had acquired the art of healing by observing a group of superhuman men and women, clad in green, who sometimes appeared fair-looking and merry, and sometimes appeared fearsome.[38] In these examples, and various other accounts, we see a conflict between high and low culture as Reformist polemic is brought to bear on the apparent beliefs and customs of those who were accused of witchcraft. Regardless of whether these women believed in their own testimonies, the accounts recorded during these trials help to emphasise the pervasiveness of faerie superstition in early modern society. Here, a belief that faeries were often used as witches' familiars was at least common enough to be applied as a defence against accusations of heresy.

It is unclear how aware Spenser was of the kind of discourses raised by Reformist thinkers such as Scot and James VI. However, some evidence for his familiarity with similar treatises can be seen in E. K.'s gloss to June in *The Shepheardes Calender*. Here, we are told that

> …the opinion of Faeries and elfes is very old, and yet sticketh very religiously in the myndes of some. But to roote that rancke opinion of Elfes oute of mens hearts, the truth is, that there be

[37] Cited in Ronald Hutton, *The Witch* (London: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 219.

[38] Ibid.

> no such things, not yet the shadowes of the things, but onely by a sort of bald Friers and knauish shauelings so feigned; which as in all other things, so in that, sought to nousell the comen people in ignorounce, least being once acquainted with the truth of things, they woulde in tyme smell out the vntruth of theyr packed pelfe and Massepenie religion.[39]

The passage shares a clear parallel with arguments that equate faerie belief with the false Catholic practices of the past, and whether E. K. is an alias for Spenser himself or a close contemporary, this example demonstrates a broader understanding of Reformist discourse within Spenser's collected works that links faeries to a particular kind of religious controversy.

In addition to this, both Stephen Orgel and Matthew Woodcock have drawn attention to an interesting instance of marginalia in a copy of the 1611 Spenser folio in which the following annotation appears: 'fayeries are [div]ells, & therefore [fa]yerieland must bee [the] divells land. And [w]hat a glorie is this [to] any, to [ca]ll her queene [of] such a place?'[40] Here, the term 'her' appears to refer directly to Elizabeth herself. The annotation highlights an important concern in relation to the representation of faeries in *The Faerie Queene*: namely, the probability of Spenser's audience identifying faerie land with the Devil as readily as with the Queen of England. If Spenser's audience was aware of such discourses, then it is likely that Spenser was too, and some closer analysis of *The Faerie Queene* will demonstrate how he navigated around this potentially problematic attribute of the faerie sign.

[39] Edmund Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, ed. by Richard A. McCabe (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 92.

[40] Stephen Orgel, 'Margins of Truth', in *The Renaissance Text*, ed. by Andrew Murphy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 91-107, p. 103; Matthew Woodcock, *Fairy in The Faerie Queene*, p. 26.

Finally, and in the specific context of Spenser's own life, it is worth briefly mentioning the possible influence of Irish mythology and folklore on his understanding of what constitutes a faerie. The significance of Ireland in relation to Spenser's conception of faerie land has been a topic of ongoing debate, particularly for those critics who have attempted to map faerie land in its entirety onto the colonial Irish landscape of the sixteenth century.[41] However, whilst there have been many attempts to suggest that Ireland played an important role in shaping Spenser's imagined faerie realm, evidence for his adoption of Irish mythological tradition in *The Faerie Queene* is less clear: particularly when it comes to faeries and the otherworld. Greenlaw, for example, argues that there is something of the Irish *sidhe* in Spenser's faerie characters. He cites, amongst other things, the example of Agapè, who is of 'goodly stature' (IV.ii.44) like the faeries of Irish mythology, rather than the diminutive faeries of English folkloric belief.[42] In truth, though, there is no way of identifying whether this image was derived from Spenser's time in Ireland. The evidence provided by Greenlaw relates just as readily to the conventions of the faerie sign in romance, after all. However, it is worth bearing in mind that Ireland presents another avenue through which Spenser's conception of faerie may have been constructed.

To an even greater extent than in the Middle Ages, then, faeries during the early modern period escape precise categorisation: they cannot be reduced to a single meaning or function. Faeries exist in a diverse range of early modern sources that emphasise a variety of

[41] See, for example, Willy Maley, *Salvaging Spenser* (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 78-98; Christopher Highley, *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Crisis in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 13-39; and Richard A. McCabe, *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For a recent appraisal of the significance of Ireland in shaping Spenser's approach to insular landscapes within his poetry, see Tamsin Badcoe's chapter 'Spenser's Insular Fictions' in *Edmund Spenser and the Romance of Space*, pp. 241-75.

[42] Greenlaw, p. 114. See also, Roland M. Smith, 'Spenser's Irish River Stories', *PMLA*, Vol. 50, 4 (1935), pp. 1047-56.

different cultural, religious, and political interpretations for their existence. As Matthew Woodcock has argued, 'Fairy as it is represented in the early modern period can be best understood as a sign with a negotiated referent, an artificial construction that actively invites interpretation to which varying meanings or significations can be assigned'.[43] Thus, if we attempt to construct an understanding of Spenser's faeries based on just one interpretation of their function – as critics such as Rathborne, Arestad, and Greenlaw have attempted to do – we are failing to recognise the different levels of meaning on which Spenser is operating.

Keeping this in mind, the following sections of this chapter will examine Spenser's different approaches to faeries in *The Faerie Queene*, demonstrating the way that he engages the reader in a continual process of interpretation and renegotiation. Broadly defined, the categories that I intend to explore here are devilish faeries, giants, classical nature faeries, and monsters.[44] As with much of this thesis, the aim here is to demonstrate that the themes and motifs associated with the faerie sign stretch beyond more conventional interpretations of faerie characters in romance. Aspects of the faerie sign appear within each of these categories, with each example telling us something different about the way that Spenser is navigating through various literary and cultural interpretations of the term 'faerie'. However, it is also important to recognise the permeability of these categories. Whilst they serve as useful lenses for considering the different ways in which Spenser cultivates meaning, these

[43] Woodcock, p. 28.

[44] In this respect, I have been motivated to some extent by Katharine Briggs' *The Anatomy of Puck* (1959), in which Briggs subdivides the faeries of sixteenth century literature into four distinct groups: heroic trooping faeries (aristocratic, human-sized faeries, derived primarily from Celtic and romance traditions); hobgoblins (rural and domestic guardian spirits, of which Puck is the best known example); mermaids and nature faeries (dangerous creatures that inhabit the wilder landscapes of Britain); and giants, monsters, and hags (sometimes considered distinct from faeries, but with some overlapping characteristics). Briggs, pp. 13-6. For a more recent appraisal of the different forms of monster found in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and the complex interplay of allegory and cultural discourse that make up their symbolic function, see Maik Goth, *Monsters and the Poetic Imagination in The Faerie Queene* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

are not exact parameters and should not be treated as such. Indeed, as the following examples will demonstrate, Spenser's willingness to transgress the established boundaries and conventions of romance is what affords his faerie realm to be invested with such richness of meaning.

Negative connotations of the faerie sign

Building on the wide range of sixteenth-century literary interpretations of faeries, this next section considers the way that Spenser acknowledges various negative conceptions of faeries or faerie-like beings in his work, either subverting them for the purposes of his allegory, or distinguishing them as something 'other' than the faerie characters who are used to glorify Elizabeth's body politic. In the case of the latter, this is most clearly evidenced in the way that Spenser engages with Reformist theology and the notion of faeries as demonic manifestations or illusions. In order to mitigate this association, Spenser appears at two brief moments to be drawing on Reformist discourse in order to distinguish specific faerie characters that inhabit Gloriana's realm from the romance-inspired faeries of his central allegory.

The first of these examples is Archimago's use of two otherworldly spirits as part of his plan to separate Redcrosse from Una at the beginning of Book I. Spenser writes that Archimago 'cursed heuen, and spake reproachful shame / Of highest God, the lord of life and light', and so 'cald out of deepe darknes dredd / Legions of Sprights' that appear 'Fluttering about his euerdamned hedd' like little flies (I.i.37-8). Two 'Sprights' answer Archimago's call and he employs one to send a message to the underworld (to request that Morpheus plague Redcrosse's sleep with 'false' dreams) whilst he moulds the other into the likeness of Una, forming 'of liquid ayre her tender partes / So liuely and so like in all mens sight' (I.i.39-42, 45).

To some extent, then, the scene functions in a comparable way to the faerie test narratives found throughout the romance tradition: Redcrosse must prove his virtue by resisting the false Una's advances whilst also demonstrating his faithfulness to the true Una (a test that he fails). However, of particular interest here is the description of sprites appearing like flies (a common motif for describing demons and witches' familiars), and the emphasis that Spenser places on seduction as integral to the function of the false Una. Archimago's attempt to deceive Redcrosse's senses brings to mind James VI's assertion that 'the deuil illuded the senses of sundry simple creatures, in making them beleeue that they saw and harde such things as were nothing so indeed'. As such, whilst the sprites' function remains similar to that of faeries in medieval romance, the process of conjuration more closely resembles the accounts of faerie familiars found in the Scottish witchcraft trials.[45]

A similar example of this kind of illusory magic occurs in Book III, when a hag full of 'diuelish deedes / And hellish arts' creates the false Florimell from snow using 'a Spright to rule the carcas dead' (III.vii.6, viii.6-7). Once again, this sprite assumes the identity of a virtuous character in order to deceive others and to engage in wanton behaviour (IV.iv-v). However, Spenser is clear that such illusions are only ever a pale imitation of the real thing. The false Florimell cannot stand up to the scrutiny of her virtuous counterpart, and when the two are placed side by side in Book V, the false Florimell instantly melts (V.iii.24). Here, the connection to demonic illusion is even stronger than in the example outlined in Book I. Spenser directly associates the spirit that inhabits the false Florimell with Satan, stating that the 'wicked Spright' had 'with the Prince of Darkenes fell somewhyle, / From heauens blis' (III.viii.8). With regard to the poem's allegory, the two Florimells serve to juxtapose virtue

[45] Further mention of sprites can be found at I.ii.32 and 2.xi.39.

with sin and chastity with wantonness, but they also function as a means of identifying and distinguishing between different types of faerie. The true Florimel exhibits only positive and courtly attributes associated with the faerie sign – her extreme beauty and her garments 'wrought of beaten gold' (III.i.15) both associate her with the faerie maidens of medieval romance – whilst the false Florimel takes on faerie characteristics that associate her with witchcraft and demonic illusion, allowing Spenser to channel the negative connotations of faeries into a single figure.

The episodes involving demonic/faerie familiars represent only a small portion of the poem, but there is still a sense that Spenser is taking care to distinguish figures associated with harmful illusory magic from the other faerie characters that populate his world. Both the false Una and the false Florimell exist in order to enact the evil designs of their respective conjurers. As such, Spenser is able to direct this potentially problematic interpretation of faeries – demonic manifestations with ties to the Roman Catholic Church – into these two distinct examples.

Another way that Spenser distances his poem from potentially negative interpretations of faeries and their function is in the way that he tackles the topic of romance itself. Romance during the early modern period was a uniquely divisive literary mode. Despite its popularity in print and on the stage, critics of romance tended to equate it with the harmful Catholic literatures of the past. For instance, in Roger Ascham's *The Schoolmaster*, Ascham writes that,

> In our forefathers tyme, whan Papistrie, as a standing poole, couered and ouerflowed all England, fewe bookes were read in our tong, sauyng certaine bookes of Cheualrie, as they sayd, for

> pastime and pleasure, which, as some say, were made in Monasteries, by idle Monkes, or wanton Chanons: as one for example, *Morte Arthure*: the whole pleasure of which booke standeth in two speciall poyntes, in open mans slaughter, and bold bawdrye […] the dayly readyng of such a booke, may worke in the will of a yong ientleman, or a yong mayde, that liueth welthelie and idlelie, wise men can iudge, and honest me do pitie[.] [46]

Thus, as Andrew King has argued, Spenser's decision to engage so extensively with the conventions of romance in *The Faerie Queene* required that he demonstrate a degree of awareness regarding the problematic vernacular tradition in which he was embroiling himself.[47] For the most part, Spenser does this by adapting the conventions of romance to enhance the propagandistic and didactic function of his allegory. One way in which this is demonstrated is through Spenser's use of giants, who resemble their medieval counterparts in terms of appearance, but whose function is to facilitate the kinds of moral tests provided in earlier texts by faeries.

Traditionally speaking, in the context of medieval romance, giants are corporeal beings, aggressive combatants, and figures of supernatural strength and size who provide extreme tests of a hero's martial ability.[48] In the *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick*, for example, Guy

[46] Roger Ascham, *English Works*, ed. William Aldis Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 230-1.

[47] King, pp. 7-11.

[48] There are a few examples within romance where a character's physiology falls somewhere between giants and faeries. For example, the Green Knight and the Carle of Carlisle (see *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and

fights with the giant Colbrond to defend England from an invasion of Danish pagans. Before they even take to the battlefield, the poet provides us with a forty-four line description of Colbrand's grisly appearance, his imposing black armour, and the entire cartload of weapons that he has brought along with him for the fight (of which the following is a brief excerpt):

> An helme he hadde on his heved sett
> And therunder a thicke bacinet;
> Unsemly was his wede.
> A targe he had wrought ful wel
> Other metel was ther non on bot stiel
> A michel and unrede.
> Al his armour was blac as piche
> Wel foule he was and lothliche,
> A grisely gom to fede.
>
> (3073-81) [49]

For Jeffrey Cohen, encounters with giants in medieval literature 'function formally as a rite of passage, inextricably linking the defeat of the monster to a political, sexual, social coming of age'.[50] As such, the author of the *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick* goes out of his way to emphasise

Sir Gawain and the Carle of Carlisle respectively) both have the physical stature of giants – The Green Knight is described as so tall that the narrator considers whether he might be 'Half etayn [giant]' (140), whilst the Carle is 'Nine taylloris yerdes' (eight meters) in height, with thighs thicker than any of the posts in his own hall (259-64) – and yet their function is closer to the kind of moral arbitration that we commonly associate with faeries.

[49] *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick*, ed. by Alison Wiggins (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004).

[50] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 66.

how fearsome and terrible an opponent Colbrond is, and this only serves to enlarge the glory of Guy's victory when he removes the giant's head with a single swing of his axe.

With regards to physical appearance, then, Spenser's giants adhere quite closely to the conventions of medieval romance. In Book I, for example, Redcrosse's encounter with Orgoglio draws specific attention to size, strength, and gruesomeness as conventional aspects of a giant's ontology:

> An hideous Geaunt horrible and hye,
> That with his tallnesse seemd to threat the skye,
> The ground eke groned vnder him for dreed;
> His liuing like saw neuer liuing eye,
> Ne durst behold: his stature did exceed
> The hight of three the tallest sonnes of mortall seed.
>
> (I.vii.8)

The description of Orgoglio certainly parallels the description of Colbrond as 'lothliche' [fearsome] and a 'grisly gom' [terrible creature]. Spenser even does something unusual with the verse here, spilling 'Ne durst behold' into the next line in a way that appears to emphasise the giant's strangeness. Orgoglio's sudden appearance would thus appear to provide a perfect opportunity for the young knight to demonstrate his martial ability. However, Spenser subverts our expectations in this instance in order to place greater emphasis on the hero's spiritual virtue rather than his martial strength. Redcrosse is defeated and thrown into a 'Dongeon deep' (I.vii.15), and it is only through the intervention of King Arthur (who is guided to help Redcrosse by Una) that the young knight is finally set free. Based on Cohen's assertion

that defeating a giant represents a coming-of-age, Redcrosse's failure in this instance marks his lack of maturity and an unreadiness to succeed in his appointed quest. Redcrosse is as unprepared to face his opponent mentally as he is physically diminished by the lack of both armour and shield. In the context of Book I's emphasis on holiness, the quality that Redcrosse lacks in this instance is faith: faith in Una and his appointed quest (at this point in the story he has abandoned Una and taken up with Duessa) and faith that his victory is ultimately determined by God (an epiphany that is finally reached during his visit to the 'house of Holinesse' in canto x).

In this regard, Redcrosse's encounter with Orgoglio bears a closer relationship to Erec's battle with Mabonagrain in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide* or with the beheading game that features in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* than it does with other examples of giants in romance. In all three cases, the protagonist faces up against an opponent of unnatural size and strength, but with the implied intention of testing some aspect of their moral or ethical resolve. The comparison is particularly apt in the case of *Sir Gawain*, as in this instance the encounter also leads to a revelation concerning the hero's moral shortcomings. Here, Orgoglio is being used in a way that equates him closely with the function of the faerie sign in medieval romance: because of Redcrosse's lack of faith and his susceptibility to Duessa's artifice at this point in the poem, he is unable to overcome the supernatural test that has been placed before him.

A similar example of Spenser's adaptation of the giant motif can be found in Book IV. Here, Scudamour encounters a figure named *Daunger* as he battles to reach Amoret in the Temple of Venus:

> But in the Porch did euermore abide

An hideous Giant, dreadfull to behold,
That stopt the entrance with his spacious stride,
And with the terrour of his countenance bold
Full many did affray, that else faine enter would.

(IV.x.16)

Once again, Spenser offers certain visual cues that relate this passage to encounters with giants in medieval romance. However, rather than defeating the giant through strength of arms, Scudamour's victory comes about as a result of his possession of 'The shield of Loue' (IV.x.8).

Eftsoones aduancing that enchanted shield,
With all my might I gan to lay about:
Which when he saw, the glaiue which he did wield
He gan forthwith t'auale, and way vnto me yield.

(IV.x.19)

Such magic artefacts were a common enough trope of medieval romance, but the tendency, as Helen Cooper has emphasised, was for those artefacts to fail at the critical moment or to be made redundant, thus making the hero's victory through his own strength and virtue all the more significant.[51] Scudamour's victory subverts convention in this respect as his success is wholly dependent on the power of the shield. Indeed, Scudamour's triumph over the giant

[51] See Helen Cooper's chapter on 'Magic that doesn't work' in *The English Romance in Time*, pp. 137-72.

is separated entirely from his own martial ability and is instead transferred onto a symbol intended to represent the protection that virtuous love can grant against *Daunger*. In this instance, then, the giant motif appears to downplay the hero's martial abilities in favour of an allegory that emphasises a Protestant (specifically Calvinist) theology pertaining to the value of sanctified love.[52]

However, an allegorical interpretation of this encounter is complicated by events that take place a little earlier within the canto. Whilst the 'shield of Loue' does permit Scudamour access to the '*Gate of good desert*' without having to use strength of arms, he still acquires the shield by single-handedly defeating a group of twenty mounted knights.

> Streight forth issewd a Knight all arm'd to proofe,
> And brauely mounted to his most mishap:
> Who staying nought to question from aloofe,
> Ran fierce at me, that fire glaunst from his horses hoofe.
>
> Whom boldly I encountred (as I could)
> And by good fortune shortly him vnseated.
> Eftsoones out sprung two more of equall mould;
> But I them both with equall hap defeated:
> So all the twenty I likewise entreated,
> And left them groning there vpon the plaine.

[52] Several critical studies have touched upon a similar argument in relation to Spenser's dragons and his manipulation of romance convention to fit within a Protestant allegorical framework. See Thomas Warton, *Observations on the Fairy Queen of Spenser*, 2nd ed. (London, 1807); Andrew King, *The Faerie Queene and Middle English Romance*, pp. 140-3; and Kenneth Hodges, 'Reformed Dragons', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 54, 1 (2012), 110-31.

(IV.x.9-10)

Scudamour, then, is not just armed with the virtue of love, but with a strength of arms akin to that of his medieval predecessors. The account of his adventure represents an intermingling of different influences on Spenser's writing that accommodates both Calvinist allegory and the traditional corporeal deeds of medieval romance.

By interpreting Scudamour's encounter in this way, I am building on arguments advanced by Matthew Woodcock, who has already made considerable inroads into identifying the interpretive value of faeries in *The Faerie Queene*. For Woodcock, the significance of Spenser's faerie land as a framing narrative for the events of the poem lies in the way that it actively invites a consideration of the role of the narrator in the process of identifying Elizabeth with Gloriana. By drawing attention to the act of myth-making, Spenser is able to associate his sovereign with a sign that accommodates a wide range of complex and potentially inflammatory interpretations.[53] Within this context, both demonic illusions and giants (as well as various other negative representations of faeries or faerie-like beings) are able to exist within the same realm as Gloriana because they draw attention to the fallibility of the faerie sign as a means of conveying meaning. Through these characters, Spenser is able to expand the possibilities of romance to accommodate the varied approaches to faeries that exist within sixteenth-century literature. In effect, the narrator draws our attention to competing interpretations of the faerie sign in order to make us question and continually evaluate the way that faerie land helps to shape the poem's allegory.

[53] Woodcock, pp. 56-65.

Despite the clear allegorical connotations of Scudamour's 'shield of Loue', for example, Spenser intentionally invests his depiction of the knightly ideal with a degree of complexity. Scudamour is empowered by Protestant values of sanctified love, but he is also distinguished by his martial ability and knightly valour. In a similar way, the inability of Redcrosse and Marinell to recognise the false Una and the false Florimel respectively emphasises the difficulty of determining the right path and recognising those who would cause you harm.[54] Thus, as with the examples explored earlier in this thesis – most notably, the romances of Chrétien de Troyes and the works of the *Gawain*-poet – Spenser exploits the uncertainty surrounding a supernatural encounter to actively engage his audience in a process of interpretation. In these earlier examples, the ambiguity of the faerie sign serves to cultivate narrative tension. It emphasises the difficulty of amalgamating disparate aspects of the knightly ideal into a unified whole, allowing the reader to sympathise with the hero's journey toward self-discovery in the process. In the case of *The Faerie Queene*, then, faeries still serve to cast doubt on the process of self-discovery, but here, more so than in earlier romances, it is the *reader's* ability to determine the correct path that is brought into question by the narrator. In the case of Scudamour's shield, for example, we are granted a certain amount of latitude to make up our own mind about the source of his true power. Spenser invites his readers to achieve a better understanding of his allegory through their ability to interpret these supernatural encounters, using their existing knowledge of romance convention, but also their ability to recognise the different approaches to faeries and faerie belief that existed in sixteenth-century society.

[54] See I.i.49-50 and V.iii.18 respectively.

The reader as questing knight

Among the inhabitants of Gloriana's realm, it is not only the monstrous and demonic faerie characters whose nature and function are complex. Indeed, some of the most ambiguous characters that we find within the poem are also some of the most human. The uncertain ontology of many of Spenser's faerie knights, lords, and ladies serves to highlight an important aspect of the readerly experience throughout the poem. Once again, such characters engage the audience in a process of interpretation. However, in these examples, we see more clearly the way that Spenser places his reader in the role of a questing knight, journeying (alongside Arthur) through faerie land in search of an idealised image of courtly virtue.

For example, the ruling faction of Spenser's faerie land is made up of those faerie knights and migrant Britons who constitute Gloriana's court. Despite attempts by critics such as Greenlaw, Arestad, and Rathborne to humanise these characters, they remain some of the most complicated examples of the faerie sign that we encounter within the poem, and some of the hardest to label with any objective certainty. Indeed, the distinction between human and faerie within *The Faerie Queene* is subject to continual renegotiation. This is most clearly demonstrated by the changeling figures of Redcrosse and Artegall, who are described variously as 'Faery', 'Elfe', 'Elfin knight', 'Faery knight', and 'ymp' throughout their respective Books, despite Spenser also taking explicit care to emphasise each character's human origins.[55] Redcrosse, for example, is descended 'from ancient race / Of *Saxon* kinges', but he was stolen away from Britain by a faerie who exchanged him for her 'base Elfin brood' (I.x.65). Likewise, we learn that Artegall is of 'no *Fary* borne […] but sprong of seed terrestriall', having

[55] For examples of this, see I.i.17, I.i.46, I.v.1, I.x.60, V.ii.37, V.iv.46, and V.xii.19.

also been 'stolne away, / Whyles yet in infant cradle' (III.iii.26). In both cases, Spenser draws on a specifically folkloric tradition in relation to those creatures that 'men do Chaungelings call' (I.x.65) and, in so doing, destabilises the boundary between the realms of Britain and faerie land by emphasising the ease with which it might be transgressed. For Woodcock, the 'experience of following the adventures of the fairy knight Redcrosse for ten cantos only to have it revealed that he is human puts us on our guard concerning how to read Spenser's subsequent fairy knights'.[56] He argues that the changeling episodes 'serve to problematize how we read the individual characters in *The Faerie Queene*' in such a way as to invite readers to participate in a process of de-familiarisation when it comes Spenser's faeries.[57]

Spenser populates the liminal spaces of Gloriana's realm with a diverse range of characters who engage the reader in a continual process of identification and interpretation. Amongst these are the nymphs, fauns, satyrs and various other antiquarian supernatural beings who appear throughout *The Faerie Queene*: one example being the 'troupe of *Faunes* and *Satyres*' (I.vi.7) encountered by Una in Book I. These creatures are not hostile figures like the giants, nor are they demonic spirits like those used by Archimago and the hag. In fact, despite their unpleasant appearance – Spenser describes them as a 'rude mishapen, monstrous rablement' possessing an air of 'rustick horror' (I.vi.8, 11) – these fauns and satyrs are largely benevolent creatures who save Una from being raped and generally show an eagerness to comfort her and put her at ease. However, their idolatrous worship, particularly of Una's donkey, suggests that they have no understanding of God and, as such, are not part of the elect of Spenser's faerie land. They operate within the natural law, but their connection

[56] Woodcock, p. 86.

[57] Ibid.

to pre-Christian antiquity separates them from the divine law of God.[58] The fauns and satyrs are able to drive away Sansloy (also an embodiment of the absence of divine law) as one wild beast might drive away another, but they show no comprehension when Una attempts to teach them religious doctrine, and there is a hint of peril involved in her eventual escape with Satyrane, who must activate his 'corage stout and bold' and employ 'carefull paine' to get them both clear of the forest (I.vi.19, 33).

Spenser employs liminal supernatural characters in a similar manner throughout the poem: for example, Helenore's encounter with 'iolly *Satyres*' in a forest (III.x.44-52), Guyon's visit to Phaedria's island in the Idle Lake (II.vi.10-1), and Calidore's encounter with a ring of dancing women in a wood (VI.x.10-8). What is significant about these examples is their reliance on wilderness as the setting within which these encounters can occur. Indeed, whilst some characters are able to transcend the boundary between the unknown wilderness and the open landscapes of Gloriana's realm (the half-knight/half-satyr Satyrane is perhaps the best example of this), most of these creatures remain firmly attached to the forests, caves, rivers, and oceans of Spenser's faerie land.[59] These liminal settings therefore function in much the same way as the untamed wildernesses found in the works of Chrétien de Troyes or in

[58] A similar argument has been raised by critics who have attempted to distinguish between humans and faeries by separating them in categories pertaining to grace and nature. A. S. P. Woodhouse, for example, has argued that human characters such as Arthur, Redcrosse, Britomart, and Artegall represent the human order of grace, whilst the various faerie characters represent the order of nature (an absence of Divine law). A. S. P. Woodhouse, 'Nature and Grace in *The Faerie Queene*', *ELH*, Vol. 16 (1949), pp. 194-228. However, the distinction does not seem to relate to whether a character is identified as either human or faerie, but where they are located within Gloriana's realm (i.e. within the liminal spaces of the kingdom). Furthermore, there is a tendency for this boundary to be transgressed at various points throughout the poem, making it difficult to determine a rigid system for categorising the inhabitants of faerie land in this way.

[59] Characters such as Furor and Occasion (II.iv.3-11) or the 'saluage man' (IV.vii.5) also appear within the open landscapes of Gloriana's realm. These occasional transgressions of boundary seem to suggest that the lines between civilised and uncivilised, court and wilderness, and good and evil are fragile and in need of protection.

Malory's *Le Morte DArthur*.[60] In essence, they serve as spaces that are antithetical to the centralised aristocratic court (Cleopolis): spaces in which the hero (or heroes) might be tested. In Book III, for example, Trompart tells Malbecco that such locations are to be feared: 'yonder in that wastefull wildernesse / Huge monsters haunt, and many dangers dwell; / Dragons, and Minotaures, and feendes of hell' (III.x.40).[61] As such, these liminal settings are entered at one's own peril, places of transformation and danger filled with a wide array of monstrosities.

In the context of the broader didactic function of the poem, these monstrous characters are also some of the most explicitly allegorical figures within Spenser's faerie land: Errour vomits up the writings of false doctrine in her dark cave (I.i.13-27); Despair (a starved wild man figure), sits alone in his similarly gloomy cave and contemplates the merits of suicide (I.ix.35-54); and Artegall encounters Enuie, Detraction, and the Blatant Beast whilst travelling through a forest on his way to the faerie court (V.xii.37-43). However, the inhabitants of these liminal spaces are not entirely estranged from the faeries and Britons that also inhabit Spenser's world. This is exemplified most clearly through Malbecco, a 'cancred crabbed Carle' who hosts Britomart, Satyrane, and Paridell at his castle in Book III (ix.3-18). Malbecco is a bad host who jealously guards his young wife and his wealth, both of which he ultimately loses.[62] Driven mad by this loss, Malbecco runs into the wilderness and eventually comes to a cliff from which he attempts to throw himself. When this proves unsuccessful, he crawls into a cave to live out his days in isolation:

[60] For a discussion of the 'forest as desert' in the works of Chrétien de Troyes and similar imaginative literatures, see Jacques le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), pp.54-8.

[61] Trompart is trying to trick Malbecco in this instance, but Malbecco's fear of the forest is strong enough that he heeds Trompart's advice and buries his treasure at the forest's edge.

[62] In this respect, he represents something of a familiar narrative convention in the form of the cuckolded husband. The main connection being drawn here is to Menelaus, established through Spenser's decision to name his two young lovers Paridell and Hellenore, the inclusion of a scene in which Paridell recounts the history of Troy, and Paridell's reference to himself as a direct descendent of Paris (III.ix.36-7).

Ne euer is he wont on ought to feed,
But todes and frogs, his pasture poysonous,
Which in his cold complexion doe breed
A filthy blood, or humour rancorous,
Matter of doubt and dread suspitious,
That doth with curelesse care consume the hart,
Corrupts the stomacke with gall vitious,
Croscuts the liuer with internall smart,
And doth transfixe the soule with deathes eternall dart.

Yet can he neuer dye, but dying liues,
And doth himselfe with sorrow new sustaine,
That death and life attonce vnto him giues.
And painefull pleasure turnes to pleasing paine.
There dwels he euer, miserable swaine,
Hatefull both to him selfe, and euery wight;
Where he through priuy griefe, and horror vaine,
Is woxen so deform'd that he has quight
Forgot he was a man, and *Gelosy* is hight.

(III.x.59-60)

Malbecco's Gollum-like transformation changes him from an inhabitant of Gloriana's realm (albeit an outsider of the court itself) into an abstract entity living in a cave.[63] He effectively becomes the embodiment of jealousy, destined to live out eternity as a 'miserable swaine, / Hatefull both to him selfe, and euery wight'.

If this can happen for Malbecco, then it raises the question as to whether similar transformations have also occurred elsewhere in Spenser's faerie realm. Have Errour, Despair, and the Blatant Beast been through a comparable process, for example? Did they begin life as faeries (or Britons) before gradually succumbing to the negative attributes of their character over time? If we read Spenser's monstrous, allegorical manifestations in this light, then they are no longer creatures that we would consider ontologically distinct from the faeries and humans of Gloriana's court. Rather, we might better explain them as a manifestation of what happens to those who allow their vices to rule them.

Whilst physical transformations do occur elsewhere in *The Faerie Queene* – Acrasia transforms men into beasts in the Bower of Bliss (II.xii.85-7) and Duessa turns Fradubio into a bleeding tree (I.ii.33-4) – these instances are typically brought about by a sorceress' magic. However, Malbecco is not the only character to transition entirely from the courtly world to these liminal, otherworldly spaces. Helena, for example, chooses to remain living in the forest – 'Embraced of a *Satyre* rough and rude' (III.x.48) – after she has fled from Malbecco's home, and Guyon only just escapes from Mammon's cave (which is filled with countless riches) with his life (II.vii.65-6). In both instances, the narrator alerts us to the temptation and danger that such spaces represent for those who venture within. Furthermore, the prison that Orgoglio throws Redcrosse into might also be considered a cave-like setting in this instance. We might

[63] Spenser describes Malbecco as having no knowledge of 'Court nor courtesie' (III.ix.3).

then consider whether Redcrosse, like Malbecco, would also have transformed into some form of abstract entity had he not been rescued by Arthur. After all, despite what seems to be a relatively short imprisonment, Redcrosse emerges from his cell looking like 'A ruefull spectacle of death and ghastly drere' (I.viii.40), an image that prefigures Despair's appearance in the next canto.

The liminal settings of *The Faerie Queene* thus closely resemble the faerie kingdoms found throughout the romance tradition. The forests, caves, and islands of faerie land are dangerous to enter because they are not bound by the same values – courtesy, virtue, fidelity, an acceptance of the Grace of God – that govern the other inhabitants of Gloriana's realm. The creatures that we find within these otherworldly spaces serve to challenge the established conventions of the court through tests of martial prowess or moral resolve. However, as with Heurodis' imprisonment in faerie land in *Sir Orfeo* or Lanval's eventual transition to Avalon in Marie de France's lay, there is a very real sense of the potential for complete assimilation into the otherworld for characters who venture unawares into Spenser's forests and caves.

The possibility for characters such as Malbecco to transition entirely thus once again draws attention to the continual process of reinterpretation that Spenser's audience is engaged in. Indeed, the ambiguity of these characters effectively allows for a particular type of engagement on the part of the reader. Here, the act of interpretation places the reader in the position of a questing knight, entering into faerie land alongside King Arthur in pursuit of an ideal. In this respect, the relationship between the reader and Spenser's faerie characters corresponds to the relationship between heroic questing knight and medieval romance faerie. These characters function as tests, encouraging the reader to search for meaning within the diverse range of ways in which Spenser employs them. It is only through the process of

reading each Book, of journeying through faerie land in its entirety, that the reader is able to comprehend what is required to 'fashion a gentleman'.

The significance of the reader's journey across all six books of *The Faerie Queene* is summarised by A. C. Hamilton, who suggests that it is only through examining Book I in its entirety (i.e. through the process of reading), that we can come to an understanding of what Spenser means by 'holiness', and it is only through examining the work as a whole that we understand how each virtue relates and intertwines with the next.[64] However, very little attention has been paid by critics to the complex and continually shifting conventions of the faerie sign within the poem, and just how important they are to our engagement with Spenser's allegory. The reader embarks on a journey through faerie land just as many of the knights of romance do, and in the process, they are invited to amalgamate the different virtues emphasised by each book into a single, unified whole.

It is, therefore, as a direct result of the diverse number of ways in which Spenser identifies contemporary interpretations of the term 'Faery' in *The Faerie Queene* that his faerie characters form such an integral part of the creation of meaning within his work. Spenser employs different meanings through his recognition of problematic, Reformist discourse on the connection between faeries and witchcraft, through an association between faeries and the mythical figures of antiquity, or by subverting or directly commenting upon the conventions ascribed to faeries in romance. The means by which Spenser's faeries inform and interact with the central allegory of the poem is thus far from straightforward. Rather, they inspire a continual process of renegotiation that challenges the reader to question the

[64] A. C. Hamilton, 'General Introduction' to *The Faerie Queene*, p. 5.

narrator's role in the construction of faerie land, and its role in the didactic and propagandistic function of the poem.

In some respects, then, Spenser's faeries share a similar function to the faeries of medieval romance. In the examples explored in previous chapters, the complexity of the faerie sign signals to the reader the difficulty of achieving certain knightly ideals. Here, once again, they serve as an obstacle to our understanding, but in this case, it is our own ability to achieve that ideal that is brought into question. We are asked to navigate between competing interpretations of their appearance and function as part of the process of understanding Spenser's allegory. Furthermore, the diversity of the inhabitants of Spenser's faerie land also draws attention to a distinctly early modern development in relation to the way that faeries proliferate throughout popular culture during this period. On the early modern stage, in particular, faeries were taking on an entirely new set of conventions that related them more closely to rural and domestic folkloric traditions. Indeed, whilst many romance texts remained popular well into the early modern period, particularly in printed chapbook form, the faerie sign and its connection to the formation of aristocratic masculine identity was being gradually superseded. The extent to which the faeries of the early modern stage retain a connection to the faeries of medieval romance is, therefore, the focus of the next and final chapter.

Chapter Five:

Faeries and the Early Modern Stage

> And, fairylike, to pinch the unclean knight[.]
>
> (4.4.57) [1]

This line from Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* goes a long way towards illustrating the complications inherent in the depiction of faeries in early modern stage drama. On the one hand, we have the suggestion that 'to pinch' is something 'fairylike', an act that is at once mischievous and painful, but also ultimately harmless. The predilection that faeries have for pinching, coupled with a largely benign temperament, are attributes that we generally associate with English folkloric belief during the early modern period, and with changing attitudes toward the supernatural that were taking place as a result of the Protestant Reformation. However, as with many aspects of early modern study, we should also be careful to acknowledge the ongoing influence that the Middle Ages had on the faeries of the early modern stage. The 'unclean knight' mentioned here, Shakespeare's Falstaff, is an indication that we are not so far away from the themes and motifs that dominated medieval faerie romance. In those texts, faeries functioned as a means of testing certain knightly ideals, such as courtly etiquette, and an adherence to ethical and moral codes. In *Merry Wives*, those disguised as faeries punish a knight for his perceived moral transgressions in a manner that seems to derive at least some of its influence from romance. Whilst the play develops much

[1] William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, general eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005). Hereafter cited in text.

of its supernatural imagery from English folkloric tradition, there is still a sense in which its structure (specifically in Act V) builds on conventions associated with the heroic quest narrative.

One of the main functions of this chapter will be to challenge widely held assumptions about how far a popular understanding of faeries, both in folklore and romance, changed between the medieval and early modern periods. In this respect, it forms part of a wider argument that endeavours to draw attention to the similarities that exist from one period to the next. On the subject of the country's transition from Catholicism to Protestantism under Elizabeth, for example, a number of critics have emphasised the continuity of certain religious practices and traditions such as the Eucharist and Baptism within the Anglican Church, and the probability that many people held on to religious artefacts and customs long after they were prohibited by the state.[2] Attitudes toward the supernatural are likely to have proved just as slow in adapting to the changing politico-religious climate of post-Reformation England. As such, whilst Reformist thinkers like James VI and Reginald Scot spoke frequently about the illusory nature of faeries or their association with the heretical magical practices of Catholic priesthood, it is likely that widespread attitudes toward faerie belief changed very little. In addition to this, an association between faeries and medieval romance, chivalry, and the trappings of courtly society remained strong in the minds of early modern audiences whose familiarity with such tales can be evidenced through the continued popularity and increasing availability of romance in reprinted editions, broadside ballads, and chapbooks, as

[2] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971) pp. 51-77; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 2nd edn. (London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 571.

well as in the work of authors like Spenser and Sidney, and in entertainments and pageants presented to the aristocracy.[3]

However, one area where we do see a significant change in how faeries are presented is in the development of the early modern stage and through the representation of faeries in theatrical performance. In many respects, the faeries of the stage had entirely different attributes and appearances when compared to their counterparts in romance. For one thing, they were no longer associated quite so intimately with the aristocracy as they had been throughout the medieval period and in Spenser's work. As we shall see in this chapter, plays such as Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* focus primarily on middle class faerie conventions and are also more commonly associated with comedy than with Arthurian romance, resulting in figures who, whilst still troublesome and mischievous, are rarely as dangerous or frightening as the entities that we come across in earlier works. No faerie of the early modern stage comes close to evoking the sense of fear associated with the threat of decapitation that looms over Gawain's encounter with the Green Knight, for example. Nor is there any imagery to match the grotesque nature of the Faerie King's courtyard in *Sir Orfeo*. Finally, whilst accounts of diminutive faeries existed during the Middle Ages – described by Giraldus Cambrensis in his *Itinerarium Cambriae*, in Walter Map's account of the King Herla story in *De Nugis Curiallium*, and in the description of Oberon in the thirteenth-century romance *Huon de Bordeaux*[4] – it wasn't until the Elizabethan

[3] See Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Pres, 1991); Barbara Fuchs, *Romance* (London: Routledge, 2004); and Nandini Das, *Renaissance Romance* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

[4] Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp. 26-31; Giraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, ed. by J. S. Brewer, James F. Dimock and George F. Warner, 8 Vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), VI, pp. 75-7; *Huon de Bordeaux*, ed. by William W. Kibler and François Suard (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2003), 3150-6.

period, and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in particular, that a taste for truly miniature faeries began to take hold of the popular imagination in England.[5]

For many critics, the above-cited differences point to the increasing role that domestic folklore and superstition, as opposed to aristocratic literature and culture, played in shaping the faeries of the early modern stage. Whilst many of these works allude to the role that romance played in influencing the popularity of faeries in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, the discussion of this point generally amounts to little more than a cursory acknowledgement of this older tradition. For most, romance is barely worth mentioning in light of the far more significant impact that an increasingly vocal and culturally engaged 'middling sort' were having on 'popular' culture at the time.[6] However, as with the impact of religious reform and the slow transition of much of the country from Catholic to Protestant practices and customs, I believe that this sudden change in the faerie sign is more complex than previous generations of critics have suggested. Whilst folklore and rural tradition are central to the depiction of early modern faeries, the impact that romance had on the representation of these supernatural entities over the previous four hundred years (and as is more clearly evident in contemporary works such as Spenser's *Faerie Queene*) cannot be easily set aside. Nor is it

[5] Latham, *The Elizabethan Fairies*, pp. 187-90.

[6] Both of these terms are problematic, but for the general purposes of this chapter it should suffice to say that by 'middling sort' I am referring in a broad sense to a group of people in the early modern period made up of yeoman, citizens, burgesses, and others of a similar status: a group distinct from the gentry and noblemen (the 'better' or 'richer' sort) on the one hand, and the labouring classes or 'vulgar' sort on the other (although, as Keith Wrightson has pointed out, the term 'middling sort' did not enter common usage until the 1640s). See Keith Wrightson, ''Sorts of People' in Tudor and Stuart England', in *The Middling Sort of People*, ed. by Jonathan Barry & Christopher Brooks (London: MacMillan: 1994), pp. 28-51. In using the term 'popular culture' I am essentially referring to 'the social practices, patterns of consumption and daily experiences of the *majority* population of a society' rather than any sense of its use as a binary to elite culture. Whilst this term can also be problematic, it helps to emphasise a sense that the faeries of the early modern period were familiar to many different social groups and a common feature in a variety of entertainments. Paul Prescott, 'Shakespeare and Popular Culture', in *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. by Margreta de Grazia & Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 269-85, p. 270. See also, Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety*, pp. 1-3.

entirely possible to separate out those aspects of faerie ontology that originate in folklore as opposed to conventions that derive from romance, there being so many points at which the two converge. The popularity of romance in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods is a widely-understood and well-documented aspect of early modern culture (both in relation to literature and drama), and yet there has been almost nothing written about this influence when it comes to faeries on the early modern stage.[7]

The new faeries of drama

Before embarking on a discussion of the medieval influences to be found in *Merry Wives*, it is worth giving a brief outline of those aspects of early modern faeries that previous scholars have identified as making them distinct from the medieval faeries that preceded them. For Minor Latham, the greatest flourishing of faeries in English literature took place (roughly) between 1570 and 1625, raising faeries to a prominent position in popular culture after a dip in popularity that saw them all but forgotten during the first half of the sixteenth century.[8] The faeries that we encounter during this 'revival' do retain certain attributes associated with their medieval predecessors, but they are also subject to a host of new cultural influences

[7] A version of part of this chapter's argument was published as '*The Alchemist* and Medieval Faerie Romance', *Ben Jonson Journal*, Volume 26, 2 (2019), pp. 206-226.

[8] M. W. Latham, *The Elizabethan Fairies* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), p. 14-5. Latham cites the exception of Lord Berners, whose translations of Froissart's *Chronicle* (1523) and *Huon of Bordeaux* (1534) both feature faeries. Otherwise, she argues that, whilst faeries remained part of English culture during the early-sixteenth century, they were not a serious enough subject to be included in the works of learned scholars or poets. I would suggest that this is only partly true. Whilst the word faerie is recorded less frequently at this time, the themes and motifs associated with the faerie sign appear in a number of popular works dating from roughly this period. Magical entities who function as moral arbiters continue to play a role in late-fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century works such as *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* (c.1500), *The Greene Knight* (c.1500), Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* (1485) and *Amadis de Gaula* (1508). However, what differentiates these works from the romances of Chrétien de Troyes or the *Gawain*-poet is a tendency to rationalise ambiguous otherworldly figures, recasting them as humans and explaining their power as derived from natural magic, witchcraft or necromancy.

that help to shape the faerie sign in a way that distinguishes it significantly from what came before. In effect, then, the faeries of the early modern period can be broadly defined by their wide appeal to a variety of audiences. As Latham suggests,

> Literary England, as well as ordinary England, court and citizen, witnessed them in pageants and royal progresses, saw them represented on the stage, played the role of the fairies in masques and in practical jokes, read them in poems and pamphlets, and sang of their beauty and power, not forgetting to make use of a charm against their wickedness on going to bed.[9]

This flexibility distinguishes early modern literary faeries from their medieval predecessors who, whilst frequently depicted as ambiguous entities, have survived to us almost exclusively through romance: a mode of writing that invariably reflected the values and beliefs of the aristocratic court.[10] As such, whilst themes associated with wealth and aristocracy were often applicable to faeries in the early modern period (as is demonstrated by the self-conscious medievalism of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*), their use in fictitious literature and drama was no longer restricted to this one approach.

[9] Latham, p. 17.

[10] It is likely that wide and varied beliefs in, and attitudes toward, faeries did exist during the medieval period, but we have very limited records of those beliefs surviving today. As Ronald Hutton suggests, the fact that we have no sense of a coherent faerie tradition existing throughout the Middle Ages may be a reflection of reality or, as is perhaps more likely, a consequence of the patchy survival of evidence (*The Witch*, p. 228).

Latham's argument was further developed by Katharine Briggs, who attributed a renewed interest in faeries to 'the rise of the yeoman writer' during the latter half of the sixteenth century.[11] For Briggs, the steady increase in the availability of printed literature at this time resulted in a corresponding increase in the number of literate people in society and a change to the types of literature being disseminated, including an increased presence within the print trade of oral forms of storytelling such as ballads and folklore. More recently, this claim has been corroborated by Tessa Watt, who suggests that the development of 'cheap-print' publishers seems to have coincided with a spike in literacy during the period 1560-90.[12] In addition, a relative increase in the affordability of books – prices stayed largely the same between 1560-1635, despite widespread inflation in other areas and a general increase in wages – meant that written materials were available to, and marketed toward, a wider cross-section of the population than they had been in previous centuries.[13] The result of this shift was an emerging generation of writers who were familiar with romance, but who increasingly built upon rural and domestic narrative traditions rather than the courtly literary conventions of previous generations. In doing so, they created new and original works which helped to shape the depiction of faeries in both literature and drama.[14]

The freedom to explore this previously untapped source was further enhanced, Briggs suggests, by a reduction in allegations of heresy between the medieval and early modern periods. This allowed faeries to become a less incendiary subject than they had been in the past and, as a result, writers seemed more willing to discuss accounts that emphasised their

[11] Katharine Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck*, p. 6.

[12] Watt pp. 7-8.

[13] Ibid, p. 261.

[14] Briggs, p. 18.

benign, domestic nature.[15] It is around this time, therefore, that we begin to see written evidence of faeries carrying out domestic chores or rural labours. For example, Reginald Scot describes these activities in an account that details some of the beliefs held by maidservants only a few generations before his own time.

> In deede your grandams maides were woont to set a boll of milke before him and his cousine Robin good-fellow, for grinding of malt or mustard, and sweeping the house at midnight: and you haue also heard that he would chafe exceedingly, if the maid or goodwife of the house, having compassion of his nakedness, laid anie clothes for him, beesides his messe of white bread and milk, which was his standing fee.
>
> (4.10) [16]

By ascribing a belief in the existence of faeries to past generations, Scot (whether intentionally or unintentionally) adopted an approach similar to that of medieval authors like Chaucer who connected the existence of faeries with 'th'olde dayes of the King Arthour […] manye hundred yeres ago' (III, 857-63). As such, it is not *when* Scot derives his knowledge of domestic faerie superstition from that is important, but the fact that he is writing about such belief at all. Here, for example, we see one of the earliest accounts of Robin Goodfellow, a domestic hobgoblin who also features prominently in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as

[15] Ibid. Diane Purkiss raises a similar argument in *The Witch in History* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 219, stating that the presence of witches on the early modern stage (and occasionally in comic roles) may suggest a reduced level of belief in witches during this period.

[16] Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, p. 48.

Oberon's faerie servant Puck.[17] Whilst Scot asserts that a belief in Robin predates his own time by several generations, thus implying an origin at some point during the Catholic Middle Ages, it is not until the late sixteenth century that Robin emerges as a popular figure within the literary tradition.[18]

In addition to Scot's account, Briggs cites the story of a Gloucester man named Willis, a scholar with some Puritan sympathies who recounts a tale that had been told to him about his birth. In this account Willis states that, just a few days after he was born, he was found crying and caught between his cradle and an adjacent wall. In describing this event, he suggests that 'if I had not cryed in that manner as I did, our gossips had a conceit that I had been quite carried away by the Fairies they know not whither, and some elfe or changeling (as they call it) laid in my room'.[19] Whilst this account appears more sinister than Scot's description of hobgoblins who sweep the house and drink from bowls of milk, there is a connection here in the way that both authors associate a belief in faeries with previous generations, and particularly with those from lower class backgrounds. In each instance, faeries are associated with the superstitious beliefs of the past.

However, there are several issues with the connection that Briggs draws between these accounts and a relaxation of heresy allegations concerning faerie belief during the sixteenth century.[20] Firstly, attacks on marvels and the supernatural appear to be no less

[17] 'Either I mistake your shape and making quite / Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite / Called Robin Goodfellow' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1.2.32-4).

[18] As Keith Thomas points out, asserting that faeries existed only in the past may be more of a rhetorical device than a statement about decreased levels of superstition at the time of writing. As such, this likely bears little relation to contemporary belief (*Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 607-8). See also, Peter Marshall's 'Deceptive appearances: ghosts and reformers in Elizabethan and Jacobean England', in *Religion and Superstition in Reformation Europe*, ed. by Helen Parish and William G. Naphy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 188-208, pp. 193-4.

[19] R Willis, *Mount Tabor or Private Exercises of a Penitent Sinner* (London, 1639), pp. 92-3, cited in Briggs, p. 22.

[20] Briggs, p. 18.

fierce in the early modern period than they were during the Middle Ages. Theologians in both periods were liable to interpret the existence of all spirits in Augustinian terms of light and dark, explaining faerie sightings as the product of demonic interference rather than the presence of ambiguous supernatural entities. Furthermore, as the previous chapter has already argued, a growing sense of discomfort regarding Catholic 'magic' – exemplified through Reformist hostility toward the power of saints, relics, Purgatory, ghosts, and the Sacraments – resulted in an increased condemnation of all magical beliefs and practices amongst religious authorities, a condemnation which may also have contributed to a sense of faeries as heretical beings.

If this is the case, then the proliferation of mischievous, but ultimately benign, domestic faeries in early modern literature and drama does not appear to be the product of a decreasing hostility toward such beings amongst Church authorities. However, it is possible that the developing popularity of folkloric faeries relates to an increased suppression of other magical and supernatural apparitions on the early modern stage, particularly toward the latter half of the sixteenth century. The control that authorities exerted over the theatres can be seen in the various acts of religious censorship that were introduced at this time.[21] Thus, whilst the theatres of the Middle Ages had been closely tied to the Church and to religious iconography, the new permanent stages of the early modern period were becoming more reliant on secular material for their productions. The impetus to find some alternative to the supernatural spectacles that had once been associated with the medieval mystery and

[21] See, for example, the 1606 *Act to Restrain Abuses of Players*, intended 'For the preuenting and auoyding of the great abuse of the holy Name of God in Stage-playes, Interludes, Maygames, Shewes and such like'. Cited in Hugh Gazzard, 'An Act to Restrain Abuses of Players (1606)', *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 61, 251 (2010), pp. 495-528. Other examples include the Bishops' Ban of 1599, or the gradual suppression of the medieval morality and mystery plays during Elizabeth's reign (the last recorded mystery play was performed at Wakefield in 1576). For more on this topic, see Christine Richardson and Jackie Johnston, *Medieval Drama* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 170-1.

morality plays, and that had featured in some early plays of the permanent stage (such as *Doctor Faustus*), may have led playwrights to focus on folkloric faerie magic instead. In essence, faeries may have represented a tamer alternative to spectacle and stage magic than biblical miracles or religious psychomachia.

However, it is also just as likely that an increased interest in folkloric faeries came about as a result of different tastes and a desire to incorporate something new into the literature and drama of the period. Attitudes toward marvels and the supernatural were so mixed and varied at this time that pinpointing one underlying explanation is difficult to manage with any certainty. What we can say is that, regardless of whether an increased interest in folklore came about because of a decreased fear and hostility toward faerie belief, a desire to find an alternative form of supernatural stage magic, changing popular tastes, a combination of all of these factors, or something else altogether, playwrights during the early modern period increasingly relied on rural and domestic interpretations of faerie ontology over the aristocratic faeries of romance. 'High trooping fairies', the category Briggs most associated with medieval romance literature, were interwoven with the hobgoblins and guardian spirits found in various folkloric traditions (as well as with the mermaids and nature spirits taken from Classical mythology). They were recast as supernatural servants and mischievous tricksters, characters who interacted more readily with the middling sort and the labouring classes rather than the aristocratic courts found in the works of Chrétien de Troyes, the *Gawain*-poet, and Spenser. Thus, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the only two-way interaction between humans and faeries is between Bottom the weaver on the one hand and Titania and her court on the other: Shakespeare actively parodies the convention of the aristocratic romance faerie by depicting Titania as subservient to an Elizabethan tradesman.

More recent criticism on the subject of early modern faeries has tended to focus specifically on gender and a recognition of the influence that women in the domestic sphere had on writers of the age. As with Briggs and Latham, these arguments build on an assumption that such faeries derive predominantly from folklore, focusing on a transmission of lower-class beliefs and values through the increasingly close intermingling of different social strata in early modern society. Both Wendy Wall and Mary Ellen Lamb, for example, emphasise the importance of domestic servants working in the homes of the middling and richer sorts. In particular, they emphasise the role of female caregivers in shaping an understanding of folkloric faeries amongst a wide range of writers including Erasmus, Reginald Scot, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Robert Herrick, and Michael Drayton.[22] Scot and Willis, as has already been observed, attributed a belief in faeries to 'maides' and 'gossips' respectively, suggesting that both men may have derived what they knew about faeries from a childhood spent amongst female servants. However, there is also an extent to which these arguments represent a convention of humanist rhetoric as readily as they speak to the true experiences of the authors. In this sense, they form part of a wider discourse, started by Erasmus, that attempted to discredit folkloric traditions and stories as detrimental to a well-rounded education. Erasmus argues that,

> On the method which I have here sketched nothing hinders that a boy learn a pretty story from the ancient poets, or a memorable tale from history, just as readily as the stupid and vulgar ballad, or the old wives' fairy rubbish such as most

[22] Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity*, pp. 94-126; Mary Ellen Lamb, *The Popular Culture of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Jonson*, pp. 25-88.

> children are steeped in nowadays by nurses and serving women. Who can think without shame of the precious time and energy squandered in listening to ridiculous riddles, stories of dreams, of ghosts, witches, fairies, demons; of foolish tales drawn from popular annals; worthless, nay mischievous stuff of the kind which is poured into children in their nursery days? [23]

For Wall, Erasmus' approach represents a widespread renaissance attitude that pitted 'humanistic pedagogy' against 'vernacular domesticity', popular against elite, and cheap-print literature against the Classics.[24] Faerie stories and old wives' tales were a distraction from a proper humanist upbringing and female domestic workers, as transmitters of this damaging popular knowledge, were the custodians.

However, regardless of the extent to which this rhetorical strategy reflects genuine experience, the faeries that feature in early modern drama do appear to be linked to this feminine, domestic world in many instances. At the end of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Puck is sent to 'sweep the dust behind the door' (5.1.390), a domestic chore that Wall draws particular attention to as contrasting with the courtly preoccupations of Oberon and Titania at the end of the play. Similarly, the faeries of *Merry Wives* are closely tied to the two housewives of the play's title; Jonson's *Entertainment at Althorp* depicts Mab as 'the mistress-fairy, / That doth nightly rob the dairy, / And can hurt or help the churning' (42-4); Marlowe's *Dido, Queene of Carthage* features a scene in which Ascanius' nurse blames faeries for his

[23] Desiderius Erasmus, 'De pueris statim ac liberaliter instituendis', in *Concerning the Aim and Method of Education*, ed. by William Harrison Woodward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), 179-222.

[24] Wall, p. 96.

disappearance (5.1.212-5); and in *Grim the Collier of Croydon* Robin Goodfellow abandons the court to go in search of 'Country maids' and 'home-spun Lasses'.[25] Furthermore, Wall refers to several texts in which faeries are linked to female sexuality, including John Lyly's *Endymion* (1591), *The Maydes Metamorphosis* (1600), John Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1608), and Thomas Campion's published songbook, *A Booke of Ayres* (1601).[26]

In light of the condemnation of faeries and old wives' tales by figures like Erasmus – not to mention those religious reformers who saw faeries as 'yet another ignorant belief to be dispelled by the truth of Protestant doctrine'[27] – their inclusion in the work of playwrights throughout the period represents something of a transgression, an example of the spread of lower-class culture, transmitted predominantly by women, into wider early modern society. As such, Regina Buccola has built on the arguments raised by Wall and Lamb by stating that plays featuring faeries 'challenge both the gender and the class norms that the patriarchal, urban-centred economy of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries seem to have privileged'.[28] Faeries served to destabilise conventional gender hierarchies, allowing women to operate in ways that they otherwise couldn't. In this respect, the function of stage faeries might be compared to the way that cross-dressing was used in plays such as *Twelfth Night* or *As You Like It*, plays in which a disruption of gender hierarchy was made palatable by the

[25] Ben Jonson, *The Entertainment at Althorp*, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. by James Knowles, general eds. David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson, 7 Vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), II, pp. 393-412; Christopher Marlowe, *Dido, Queene of Carthage*, in *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Fredson Bowers, 2 Vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), I, 1-70; *Grim the Collier of Croydon*, cited in Wall, p. 103. All further references to the works of Jonson and Marlowe will be taken from these editions and hereafter cited in text.

[26] Wall, p. 103. We might also include Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock* (1712) as part of this list. Although this is a later work, Pope draws on the connection between female sexuality and his fairly-like Sylphs in much the same way.

[27] Lamb, p. 30.

[28] Regina Buccola, *Fairies, Fractious Women, and the Old Faith*, p. 23.

conventions of Saturnalian festive comedy and pastoral romance. Buccola's monograph focuses on a number of plays (*Dream*, *Merry Wives*, *The Alchemist*, *Cymbeline*, and *All's Well that Ends Well*), emphasising how each allows its author to explore themes associated with unruly women, female power, and the subversion of religious or gender norms. In each of these examples, the close link between unruly women and faeries (or tropes commonly associated with faeries) gives licence to the author to confront certain socioreligious or religiopolitical conventions.[29]

Encounters with faeries in early modern drama tend, however, to result in a return to the *status quo* by the play's conclusion, ensuring that such gender imbalances are addressed. We see this most strikingly in *Dream*, in which the formerly unruly women (Hippolyta, Hermia, Helena, and Titania) are all silenced or subdued by the play's conclusion. However, the faerie women of early modern drama are still afforded an autonomy that is not granted to their medieval counterparts. Indeed, whilst medieval romance has no shortage of powerful faerie women, these characters are often depicted as part of a hierarchy that ultimately relies on a patriarchal system with a masculine figure as the head-of-state. Tryamour in *Sir Launfal* and Rhiannon in *Pwyll, Pendefig Dyved* are both described as daughters of an otherworldly king, whilst the faerie queen in *Thomas of Erceldoune* is subservient to both her husband (the faerie king) and Satan.[30] Notable exceptions to this include the unnamed faerie woman in Marie de France's *Lanval* and in the anonymous *Graelent*, but it isn't until the early modern period that we see female figures depicted as the highest authority within the faerie realm on a more

[29] Buccola also argues that the connection between faeries and transgressive women has continued to the present day. She writes: 'Sprinkler of stardust and speaker of tinkle-talk though she may be, Tinkerbell is still recognisable as a female fairy rebel. She fights along with Peter and the Lost Boys, and she unabashedly pursues the Boy Who Refuses to Grow Up with all the verve of her lusty progenitor, the Fairy Queen' (p. 199).

[30] *Sir Launfal*, 280; *The Mabinogion*, p. 11; *Thomas of Erceldoune* (Thornton MS), 221-4, 287-92.

regular basis: a phenomenon that was likely influenced by the connections being drawn between faeries and female power through the Cult of Elizabeth.[31] Spenser's Gloriana rules over faerie land, Jonson's pseudo-faerie queen in *The Alchemist* appears similarly autonomous, and Shakespeare's Titania, whilst not entirely independent of Oberon, still exhibits more power and freedom of will than many of her medieval counterparts.

However, Buccola ultimately concludes that her emphasis on transgressive women is just one way of approaching faeries on the early modern stage, inviting others to comment on their role as creatures that intervene in human affairs on a much wider scale. For my own part, I believe that medieval romance and its potential impact on plays such as *Merry Wives* and *The Alchemist* needs to be considered in more detail. Thus, whilst I generally agree with Buccola's sense of the emphasis placed on female power in the faerie realm during this period, and with arguments related to the subversion of gender norms raised by critics such as Wall, Lamb, and Buccola, none of these scholars acknowledge (in any detail) the important role medieval romance played in shaping such powerful and transgressive female figures in the first place. The remainder of this chapter will attempt to address some of these oversights and to explore the impact that romance, as an important and pervasive mode of popular entertainment, had on the faeries of the early modern stage.

Romance on the early modern stage

Many medieval romances remained in circulation well into the early modern period, thanks largely to a burgeoning print trade and the widespread popularity of new printed editions of

[31] Jean Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I*, p. 23.

medieval texts, broadside ballads, and abbreviated chapbook editions of romance tales. In addition, highbrow literary works such as Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Philip Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* established a new tradition of romance, helping to reinvigorate its cultural cachet amongst authors and audiences alike. In the specific context of drama, we can draw attention to plays that adapt, or take their influences from, romance. The Folger Shakespeare Library's *Lost Plays Database* and Wiggins and Richardson's *British Drama, 1533-1642* are useful resources in this regard, demonstrating the extent to which romance was adapted and performed on the stage, particularly during the last decades of the sixteenth century. Amongst the plays recorded in these catalogues are various romance titles, including 'The Red Knight' (1576, a possible adaptation of the Middle English *Sir Perceval of Galles*), 'Huon of Bordeaux' (1593), 'Palamon and Arcite' (1594, adapted from Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*), and 'Tristram de Lyons' (1599), as well as several plays with intriguing titles such as 'Delphrygus and the King of the Fairies' (possibly 1570s) and 'Fairy Knight' (1624).[32]

Many of these plays, and particularly those from the early years of the permanent stage, have been lost. However, one surviving example that we can draw upon is *The Tragical History, Admirable Achievements and Various Events of Guy Earl of Warwick*. The play is a partial adaptation of the legend of Guy of Warwick, a story that first appears in its entirety in the early thirteenth-century, Anglo-Norman *Gui de Warewic*. However, Guy's legend remained popular well into the early modern period, surviving in a number of different forms including prints adapted from surviving Middle English versions of the story by Richard Pynson (c.1500) and William Copland (c.1565), several ballad versions published throughout the late

[32] *Lost Plays Database*, <https://lostplays.folger.edu>, accessed May 8, 2019; Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, *British Drama, 1533-1642*, 9 Vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also, *Staging Early Modern Romance*, ed. by Mary Ellen Lamb and Valerie Wayne; and Cyrus Mulready, *Romance on the Early Modern Stage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and Samuel Rowland's *The Famous Historie of Guy, Earl of Warwick* (1607).[33] The author and date of composition of the play are uncertain. It was first published in 1661 by Thomas Vere and William Gilbertson, but scholars generally agree that it was written much earlier than this, with most suggesting a date in the early-to-mid 1590s. Helen Cooper, for example, highlights some key features of the play that help to situate it within this time period. These include a prominent Marlovian verse style, Sparrow the clown's similarity to characters such as Strumbo in *Locrine* (1594) and Mouse in *Mucedorus* (1590), and a possible connection to contemporary events, including Shakespeare's publication of *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and the Marprelate controversy (1588–89).[34]

With regard to authorship, there is a very slim chance that *Guy Earl of Warwick* was written by Ben Jonson. The author's initials on the title page are 'B. J.' and, for this reason, the play might represent a very early attempt (perhaps even a first attempt) at playwriting for a young Ben Jonson barely out of his teens.[35] However, whilst confirmation of Jonson's authorship would be beneficial for assessing his engagement with romance materials (a topic that is covered in the next section of this chapter), this connection is rarely given credence. The style of the play (a sweeping romance of the kind that Jonson would later criticize in *The Magnetic Lady*), and the lack of evidence connecting him to its production make his authorship unlikely. It is more probable that Vere and Gilbertson included the initials in their

[33] Tessa Watt, p. 271; Helen Cooper, 'Guy of Warwick, Upstart Crows and Mounting Sparrows', in *Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson*, ed. by Takashi Kozuka and J. R. Mulryne (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006), 119-38, pp. 121-2.

[34] Cooper, 'Guy of Warwick', pp. 124-7. See also, John Peachman, 'Links between *Mucedorus* and *The Tragical History, Admirable Achievements and Various Events of Guy Earl of Warwick*', *Notes and Queries*, Vol. 53, 4 (2006), pp. 464-5.

[35] *Guy of Warwick, 1661*, prep. by Helen Moore (Manchester: Manchester University Press for the Malone Society, 2007), p. 11. Hereafter cited in text.

publication as an advertising ploy, intending to evoke one of the best-known playwrights of the mid seventeenth century in an attempt to increase sales.[36]

Regardless of the exact identity of the author (or authors), it is clear that the intention was to adapt a popular story that had already been widely disseminated in various printed romances, broadside ballads, and chapbooks, and that may even have been familiar to the audience through earlier staged productions as well.[37] Therefore, the play, which focuses on the second half of Guy's life (his pilgrimage, his fight with Colbron the giant, his life as a hermit, and his death), spends relatively little time establishing the context for his adventures. We learn, in a brief chorus delivered by Time, that Guy has fought with the 'sauage Bore of Calledon' and the 'wild Cow on Dunsmore Heath' (1.22–51), and that he has married Felice (here called 'Phillis'), daughter of the previous Earl of Warwick, inheriting the title of Earl for himself. The brevity of this introduction suggests that the author expected his audience to be familiar with the subject matter already. Indeed, he seems to play on this assumption at various points in the performance. One example is when Sparrow, Guy's clownish companion, mistakenly greets Oberon, king of the faeries, by asking 'Little Gentleman is your name King *Colbron*?' (2.516). The moment allows Sparrow to poke fun at the faerie king's height by confusing him with the giant Colbron, but it also builds on the audience's anticipation of future events by having Sparrow unwittingly foreshadow Guy's fight with Colbron later in the story. Sparrow's outrage at having been set upon by faeries and his declaration that they have killed him 'in the Buttock' (2.509) is thus also an acknowledgement of the audience's familiarity with romance convention. The fear and anger expressed by Sparrow in these lines

[36] Cooper, 'Guy of Warwick', p. 128.

[37] It is possible that the text was adapted from a longer production, designed to be performed by a strolling company of players, and covering the entire story of Guy's life as told in the Middle English romances (Cooper, 'Guy of Warwick', p. 132).

reflect the very real peril that encounters with faeries could engender in medieval romance, but here the joke is on Sparrow: the two are never in any real danger and the faerie troop prove to be entirely benevolent.

This scene, in which Guy is freed from the spell of a wicked enchanter by Oberon and his faerie troop, does not appear in any of the legends of Guy of Warwick. Indeed, earlier versions of Guy's story are notable for their lack of reference to faeries or journeys into the secular otherworld. Instead, the source for this particular passage comes from *Huon of Bordeaux*, a French medieval romance that would have been just as well-known to early modern audiences thanks to a popular translation by John Bourchier (Lord Berners), first published in the 1540s.[38] The familiarity of early modern audiences with the character of Oberon was also widespread enough at this time to require little in the way of explanation for his identification as the faerie king. Further examples of his appearance in early modern theatre and poetry, such as Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595–96), Ben Jonson's *Oberon, the Faery Prince* (1611), and Michael Drayton's *Nimphidia* (1627), attest to the continuing popularity of this character across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Still, the scene itself fits uncomfortably into a play that otherwise focuses on Guy's holy pilgrimage and his search for salvation. Indeed, Guy's role at this point is almost entirely passive, as he falls victim to an enchanter's charm in the first place and is only revived by the seemingly happenstance appearance of Oberon and his troop: hardly the kind of behaviour expected of an adventuring romance hero.

[38] The faerie king's height in *Guy Earl of Warwick* appears to be a direct reference to Oberon in *Huon of Bordeaux*, who is described as being 'of height but of thrée foote'. John Bourchier, *The ancient, honorable, famous, and delighfull historie of Huon of Bourdeaux* (London: Thomas Purfoot, 1601), n.pg. For more on *Huon of Bordeaux* as a source, see Helen Moore's introduction in *Guy of Warwick, 1661*, p. xv.

It is likely, therefore, that the inclusion of this scene in *Guy Earl of Warwick* has more to do with pandering to assumed audience expectations than it does with advancing Guy's penitential narrative arc or contributing to his prestige as a chivalrous knight. Oberon and his faerie troop appear in the play because both the author and the audience expect faeries to feature in heroic quest narratives (even if they do not appear in previous versions of the story). If this is the case, then to what extent do these faeries still perform the function of their medieval counterparts? On the one hand, it is clear that Oberon does not represent the same challenges to Guy's moral integrity that typify encounters with faeries in medieval romance. However, whilst Guy does not undergo the same trials, we might still draw attention to the different treatments of Guy and Sparrow at the hands of Oberon's faeries. Guy, an exemplar of the medieval chivalric ideal, is treated with honour and respect by the faerie troop. As with various versions of the Grail narrative, we read Guy's journey as a progression away from the trappings of martial prowess and courtly love and toward a heightened emphasis on piety and spiritual devotion. Although Oberon does not function as a moral arbiter in the same way that many other faerie characters do, his involvement with Guy (rescuing him from enchantment and guiding him to the Holy Land) still helps to structure the hero's attempt to amalgamate different aspects of his knightly persona into a single, unified ideal (turning his martial ability to the service of God).

Sparrow, by contrast, does not fare so well at the hands of the faeries. He first criticises and insults them, declaring 'I care not what they be' and describing them as 'whorson little pigpies', but when they set about him and begin pinching his body, Sparrow cries out to Guy in fear (499–505). The description of diminutive faeries who pinch their victims incorporates elements of a folkloric tradition similar to that discussed by critics such as Briggs, Latham, and Buccola. However, in this context, it aids in exaggerating the moral and social gulf between

the two characters. Sparrow is far more interested in filling his belly than he is with seeking salvation, demonstrating his courage, or conveying himself honourably. When Guy asks him to find an entrance to the enchanter's tower, he replies 'I have a stomack like a Horse, but no heart in the world to go to such a break-fast' (416–17). Sparrow's encounter with faeries, and his subsequent pinching, thus helps to emphasize his unsuitability for romance. As is typical of clown characters from the 1590s (see, for example, Robin and Rafe in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*), he serves as a counterpoint to the central narrative arc: a character who has wandered into the wrong story, entirely out of place in this world of adventures, faeries, giants, and enchanted towers.

Doll, the faerie queen

The ongoing popularity of heroic quest narratives and faeries in examples such as *Guy Earl of Warwick* suggests that we should be paying closer attention to medieval romance as a source of inspiration for early modern drama. However, when considering a play like *The Alchemist*, this leaves us with the problem of how to conflate romance faeries with Ben Jonson's apparent scorn for stories related to chivalry, piety, the supernatural, or the hero's search for self-realisation. Indeed, Jonson has generally been thought of as a playwright who is resistant to supernatural phenomena, at least in the sense of it having any tangible existence within the worlds of his plays. As Ian Donaldson is quick to point out, Jonson's imaginative creations were a far cry from the 'teasing, shadowy world that Shakespeare invokes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'.[39]

[39] Ian Donaldson, *Ben Jonson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 63.

In addition to this, Jonson's preoccupation with money, along with a focus on urban settings and the intermixing of different social strata, has often been used by critics who wish to indicate the playwright's dislike of romance as a literary mode. His scepticism regarding anything supernatural and his use of sham magical practices to emphasise the gullibility of characters (particularly in *The Alchemist*) suggest that he had little time for the kind of marvellous encounters that feature in Arthurian quest narratives. For the most part, this approach to Jonson's work has developed from a brief note in the *Informations to William Drummond of Hawthornden*, in which Drummond suggests that 'Spenser's stanzas pleased [Jonson] not, nor his matter'.[40] Accordingly, critics such as Herford and Simpson (1925), Frances Yates (1975), and David Norbrook (1984) have tended to emphasise Jonson's distaste for the matter of romance and, in particular, his distaste for Spenser's archaic style of writing. However, we know that Jonson did engage with works by medieval authors. In *Discoveries*, he writes that a good master must be careful of 'letting [young pupils] taste Gower or Chaucer at first, lest falling too much in love with antiquity, and not apprehending the weight, they grow rough and barren in language only' (1276-8). Jonson recommends caution when reading antiquated texts, particularly for those learning to write in English, but he also sees them as works with value and artistic merit, works that should be included alongside Classical and contemporary literature as part of a well-rounded education.

Accordingly, there is an extent to which we might read Jonson's work as influenced by, or participating in, a culture that is still heavily governed by the themes and motifs of romance literature and its accompanying focus on the supernatural. Faeries, after all, were not entirely absent from Jonson's work. In his *Entertainment at Althorp* – written and

[40] William Drummond, *Informations to William Drummond of Hawthornden*, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, 5, p. 14.

performed for Queen Anne and Prince Henry in 1603 – an artificial ring was cut into a procession path to hint at the presence of faeries. As such, and even though Jonson reveals faerie rings to be human constructions later in the performance, his incorporation of this well-known motif at least demonstrates an awareness on his part of the imagery and conventions associated with the faerie sign.[41] A similar point can be made regarding Jonson's masque *Oberon, The Faery Prince*, in which Prince Henry himself was said to have taken the role of Oberon. As Mary Ellen Lamb has observed, this association between Oberon and Prince Henry seems to allude to Oberon (Henry VIII), father of Tanaquill (Queen Elizabeth), in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (2.10.76), suggesting that, in this particular instance, Jonson is drawing direct inspiration from a romance source.[42] What these two examples demonstrate is that, whilst Jonson may well have dismissed the credibility of faerie belief, the potency of faeries as a literary symbol was clearly still strong enough in his eyes to merit including them in his work when it suited his purpose.

Furthermore, criticism in the last twenty years or so has begun to re-evaluate Jonson's relationship with romance. Indeed, with the discovery of Jonson's heavily annotated edition of Spenser's folio (published in 1617), scholars such as James Riddell and Stanley Stewart have argued that Jonson not only liked the matter of Spenser's work, but also his language, his verse style, and even his propensity for copious, descriptive passages. In so doing, they claim that Jonson saw Spenser as part of a glorified English tradition of narrative verse that placed him in the exalted company of Chaucer, an accolade that no other contemporary (or near-

[41] For Ian Donaldson 'Jonson's device is a conscious rhetorical hyperbole, amused, sophisticated, half-ironical, signalling his belief not in the supernatural world but in the power of the new Stuart dynasty, which might (who knows?) call up the impossible fairies at that entrancing midsummer moment' (p. 64).

[42] Lamb, p. 197.

contemporary) of Jonson's appeared to merit.[43] With this in mind, we might dispel the notion that Doll's faerie queen represents an indictment of Spenser and the romance tradition, or a direct attack on the Cult of Elizabeth and its association with faeries (as critics such as Frances Yates and David Norbrook have suggested), and instead focus on Jonson's use of medieval literary conventions, already embedded within early modern society, as a means of exploring themes of class and wealth within a contemporary London townhouse setting.[44]

As with most criticism interested in early modern faeries, approaches to Doll's faerie queen in *The Alchemist* have tended to focus on the significance of popular beliefs (or the lack thereof) as integral to understanding Jonson's motivation. Scholars such as Thomas Willard and Piotr Spyra, for example, emphasise the role that printed pamphlets played in popularising the accounts of cozeners who conned their victims into giving up wealth in exchange for a meeting with the faeries.[45] Two accounts in particular, those of John and Alice West and of Judith Philips, share some interesting parallels with the rituals and preparations required of Dapper before he can meet with the faerie queen.[46] For both Willard and Spyra,

---

[43] James Riddell and Stanley Stewart, *Jonson's Spenser* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 1995), p. 45.

[44] Frances Yates, *Shakespeare's Last Plays* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 115; David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 177.

[45] Thomas Willard, 'Pimping for the Fairy Queen', in *Crime and Punishment in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, ed. by Albrecht Classen and Connie Scarborough (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 491-508, pp. 492–96; Piotr Spyra, 'Ben Johnson's *The Alchemist*: The Essential Guide to Early Modern Fairy Belief', *Folklore*, Vol. 128, 3 (2017), pp. 292-3. For earlier essays on the connection between faeries and con-artistry in *The Alchemist*, see C. J. Sisson, 'A Topical Reference in *The Alchemist*', in *Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies*, ed. by James McManaway et al. (Washington D. C., Folger Shakespeare Library, 1948), pp. 739-41; and J.T. McCullen, 'Conference with the Queen of Fairies', *Studia Neophilologica*, Vol. 23 (1951), pp. 87-95.

[46] In the case of the Wests, they were tried in Newgate for convincing a wealthy Hammersmith resident named Thomas Moore that they were 'familiarly acquainted with the King and Queen of Fairies'. As part of their deception, the Wests took the man into a vault where he was shown 'two attired like the King and Queen of Fayries, and by them little Elues and Goblings, and in the same place an infinite company of bags, and upon them written, this is for *Thomas Moore*, this is for his wife'. The same process was also carried out with the maid of the house, who claimed she had seen so much treasure arrayed around the faeries that she 'insisted before the bench there could not be so little as seuenteen hundred thousand pound, all of which this cheatresse [Alice West] affirmed was for her master'. *The Seuerall Notorious and levvd Cousnages of Iohn*

the inspiration for Jonson's faerie queen thus relates to his familiarity with contemporary accounts that associated faeries with con-artistry. However, Spyra also argues that Jonson's understanding of faerie lore was based on more than the contents of popular pamphlets. To this end, he cites instances from the play that appear to draw their inspiration from contemporary attitudes toward witchcraft and demonology (the familiar appearing in the shape of a fly), faeries and Catholicism (Subtle's role as the '*Priest of Fairy*'), and folkloric beliefs and superstitions (the link between faeries and hidden treasure).[47] These examples demonstrate that Jonson's awareness of the various beliefs surrounding faeries extended beyond the cozening pamphlets that represented faeries as linked to instances of trickery or deceit. Indeed, as Spyra suggests, no single source can comfortably account for 'the manifold aspects of fairy belief' that appear to be represented within the play.[48]

Medieval romance and its role in shaping Jonson's faerie queen do not feature in either Willard or Spyra's work.[49] However, many of the influences that Spyra attempts to attribute to folklore (liminal spaces, the wealth of faerie kingdoms, the impact of the otherworld on mortals) might just as easily be derived from a prior knowledge of faeries in romance literature. Part of the problem here is that it is difficult to distinguish between the two due to an inevitable blending of ideas related to faeries across both high and low

VVest, and Alice VVest (London: Edward Marchant, 1613). In another example, Judith Philips was accused of convincing a man from Hampshire to let her put a saddle on his back and to ride him around a tree behind his house. Philips had assured the man of her ability to help him find hidden treasure, and the ritual riding was a necessary step in allowing her to meet with the Queen of Faeries in order to obtain a vast wealth on his behalf. *The brideling, sadling and ryding, of a rich churle in Hampshire, by the subtill practise of one Iudeth Philips* (London: William Barley, 1595).

[47] Spyra, p. 296.

[48] Ibid., p. 306.

[49] Spyra does very briefly acknowledge that Dapper's ritualized imprisonment in the privy relates in some way to the ritual tests imposed on the heroes of *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, but the argument is not developed further than this brief observation (p. 308).

cultures.[50] For example, Spyra suggests that the townhouse in *The Alchemist* evokes a certain liminality traditionally associated with settings such as hills or forests in faerie lore. By crossing over the threshold into the house (and so also onto the stage) the three cozeners and their various patrons are crossing into a parallel dimension, 'a place both familiar and unfamiliar', that appears to morph and adapt from faerie court to alchemist's office depending on the con being enacted.[51] This liminality, he argues, also relates to the moral liminality of the folkloric faeries and their existence on a boundary between good and evil. However, both of these associations with liminality (spatial and moral) are just as integral to representations of faeries in romance. To suggest that Jonson is drawing on one rather than the other here seems to imply a prior knowledge of Jonson's sources, sources that are far from clear.

What we can say for certain is that Doll's faerie queen reflects many of the aesthetic and ontological qualities of her medieval counterparts. Jonson chooses to depict her as human-sized and he follows established themes and motifs such as wealth and status, moral ambiguity, and beauty: familiar tropes that must derive, at least in part, from the medieval tradition that dominated popular culture for the preceding four hundred years. Her royal status certainly seems to elevate her beyond the rural or domestic faeries of popular tradition, putting her on a par with characters such as Tryamour in *Sir Launfal*, the otherworldly king and queen of *Sir Orfeo*, Pluto and Proserpine in *The Merchant's Tale*, or

[50] A similar argument is raised by Peter Marshall in relation to critics who emphasize a top-down transmission of ideas in the context of faeries and demonology during the early modern period. For Marshall, to suggest that cultural transmission works in only one direction (i.e. the Reformist Church imposing its view of faeries as demonic on the rest of the population) is nonsensical. Ideas flowed in both directions, with high and low cultures influencing each other in equal measure. It is important to acknowledge, therefore, that folkloric faerie belief in the early modern period had been subject to exposure from ideas taken from romance literature over the previous four hundred years, just as romance literature initially adapted and incorporated imagery taken from Celtic and Breton oral tradition. Peter Marshall, 'Protestants and Fairies in Early-Modern England,' in *Living with Religious Diversity in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by C. Scott Dixon, Dagmar Freist, and Mark Greengrass (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 139-59, pp. 158-9.

[51] Spyra, p. 300.

Spenser's Gloriana. Allusions to the queen's status are enhanced further by the ceremony itself, which seems to be poking fun at the formality of aristocratic or religious ceremony as much as it plays on Dapper's susceptibility to faerie belief.

> *Subtle*. Is yet her Grace's cousin come?
>
> *Face*. He is come.
>
> *Subtle*. And is he fasting?
>
> *Face*. Yes.
>
> *Subtle*. And hath cried 'hum'?
>
> *Face*. Thrice, you must answer.
>
> *Dapper*. Thrice.
>
> *Subtle*. And as oft 'buzz'?
>
> *Face*. If you have, say.
>
> *Dapper*. I have.
>
> *Subtle*. Then, to her coz:
>
> Hoping that he hath vigegared [sic] his senses,
>
> As he was bid[.]
>
> (3.5.1–6)

Here, the chanting of 'hum' and 'buzz' suggests a kind of hocus pocus language comparable with Robin's attempt to read Faustus' book of necromancy in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (A-Text): '*Sanctobulorum Periphrasticon!*' and '*Polypragmos Belseborums framanto pacostiphos tostu Mephistopheles!*' (3.2.25–27). Marlowe's comic subplot seems to be poking fun at Latin as the language of ritual magic as readily as it mocks Robin and Rafe for their ignorance.

Likewise, Face and Subtle use nonsensical language and ceremony to evoke a sense of the courtly splendour and mystery that we find in representations of faeries throughout the romance tradition. They insist on a series of farcical rituals and observances that must be completed in order to appease the queen, whilst simultaneously stripping Dapper of any valuables in the process. Jonson's life was spent divided between the urban City of London and the courtly world of Westminster, and this scene may hint at his own relationship with the aristocracy, both as a source of patronage and social prestige, but also as an elite culture that demanded a certain amount of pandering and hoop-jumping in order for an individual to progress.[52]

An emphasis on social standing is also made explicit through the cozeners' continued insistence on Dapper's relation to the faerie queen, connecting the clerk's social-climbing aspirations with the discovery of a noble lineage. Gullibility, itself a common source of humour throughout Jonson's work, seems here to derive from Dapper's familiarity with the hero's arc in romance, in which encounters with faeries lead to the acquisition of wealth and status (his intention, after all, is to obtain a faerie familiar that will help him to earn money while gambling). In this sense, his desired trajectory mirrors that of the fair unknown hero of medieval romance. Similar to the noble lineages of characters such as Gareth in Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, Perceval in Chrétien's *Le Conte du Graal*, or Redcrosse in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Dapper's noble ancestry has been concealed and can only be reinstated through a series of trials that will prove him worthy of the honour.

[52] For Jonson's relationship with both London and Westminster, see Martin Butler, 'Jonson's London and its theatres', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson*, ed. by Richard Harp and Stanley Stewart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 15-16.

Dapper's association with the faerie queen thus seems to serve two distinct purposes within Jonson's play. On the one hand, he is an object of ridicule, a gull, susceptible to believing in faeries, familiars, and the magical potency of vinegar. The audience is able to laugh at his follies because they see the world of the play from the perspective of the three cozeners: Jonson's scepticism effectively becomes their own. However, Dapper is also a man attempting to raise his status in a society that deems transgressions of class to be a taboo. Jonson invites us to laugh knowingly at Dapper's ignorance whilst simultaneously recognising his romance-inspired flight of fancy (the revelation of a hidden, noble identity). Of course, there is no risk of Dapper ever actually acquiring the new social status that he has been promised. As with Mosca's transgression of class boundaries in the final act of *Volpone*, Jonson is engaging with ideas related to social mobility that ultimately prove unfulfillable.[53] Dapper's interaction with the faerie queen establishes the possibility that Jonson is drawing on romance as a mode in which social hierarchies and the established values of courtly society might be put to the test, whilst simultaneously allowing for a return to the *status quo* by the narrative's conclusion. The use of romance motifs, associating faeries with wealth and aristocracy, in a play that simultaneously emphasises a relationship between faeries and con artistry, thus serves as an example of *The Alchemist*'s ridiculing of those who aspire to new wealth and upward mobility.

Still, there is a limit to the extent to which we can read the influence of medieval faerie romance in shaping the meanings of Jonson's work. What we do not find within *The Alchemist* is any sense of moral accountability amongst its characters. For Anne Barton, Dapper is 'a man

[53] 'Many of Jonson's plays, *Epicene*, *The Alchemist* and *The Devil is an Ass* among them, mock the aspirant, socially mobile figure of the newly rich, satirizing their fashions and behaviours and implicitly supporting those aristocratic or conservative characters who wish to put them back "in their place"'. Clare McManus, 'Rank', in *Ben Jonson in Context*, ed. by Julie Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 245-53, p. 245.

carried away by the prospect of a new and more spacious life'.[54] The construction of his 'dream self' is shaped by the images of wealth and splendour that are implanted in his head by Subtle and Face. In one respect, this mirrors the emphasis placed on acquisition of wealth as one of the main benefits to be derived from encounters with faeries in medieval romance. Thomas Chestre's *Sir Launfal* is a particularly gratuitous example of this: a story that seems to actively indulge in descriptions of the wealth and luxury that Launfal has access to whilst in favour with his faerie mistress.[55] However, Doll's appearance as the faerie queen does not hinge on Dapper demonstrating certain ethical or spiritual values in quite the same way as it does in the case of Launfal or in similar examples of medieval romance. Rather, Jonson's subversion of the faerie motif in this instance suggests that faeries appear, not because Dapper needs to be tested, but because he has already shown himself to be flawed. Conventional romance values such as honour, martial prowess, love, and piety are not represented here because Jonson is not interested in people's virtues, he is interested in their failings. By recognising romance as an influence in this instance, we highlight the way that Jonson is actively parodying a literary mode that equates wealth with goodness. Doll's faerie queen still draws attention to human values in much the same way that romance faeries do, but in Jonson's world that mirroring helps to reflect qualities associated primarily with greed and material gain.

[54] Anne Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 139.

[55] See, for example, lines 416-32 for a description of the feasts, riches, and fine clothing that Launfal shares with everyone after leaving Tryamour's pavilion. See also, A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 109.

The new chivalry and Shakespeare's *Merry Wives*

The Alchemist demonstrates that, whilst remnants of the medieval faerie sign still exist within early modern drama, the function of this sign was undergoing significant changes. Foremost amongst these changes is the decreased role that faeries played in the formation of an idealised image of masculine aristocracy. Whilst this can, in part, be attributed to the increasing influence of folkloric and domestic culture on the early modern stage, as critics such as Briggs, Latham, and Buccola have attested, we might also consider how new approaches to individual identity and to chivalry as a marker of masculine nobility might have impacted on the way faeries were being used at this time. This has particular ramifications when considering the faeries of Shakespeare's *Merry Wives* as, whilst this is a play that ostensibly relates its faerie characters to domestic women (Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, who mastermind the whole deception), to children (those who appear dressed as faeries 'to pinch the unclean knight'), and to naive or foolish characters (Slender, Doctor Caius, and Falstaff, all of whom are duped by the performance in some way), it is also a play that is interested in aristocratic and chivalric identity.

Scholars have long thought of the Renaissance as a time of change in relation to the formation of identity and a knowledge of the self. For many, this period in history marks a moment when identity shifted away from a unified, stratified medieval self toward a more fractured, problematic subjectivity.[56] Stephen Greenblatt's influential *Renaissance Self-*

[56] Arguments related to the early modern period as a time of significant change in our understanding of the self are generally considered to originate with Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860). More recent examples of this approach include Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body* (Methuen: London, 1984); Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1985); Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Blackwell,

Fashioning, for example, claims that, whilst the process of self-fashioning remained dependent on social constructs and institutions, the early modern period experienced a noticeable shift in the 'intellectual, social, psychological and aesthetic structures that govern the generation of identities', resulting in a time of 'increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process'.[57] In effect, whilst various cultural institutions (family, religion, state) still influenced the process of self-expression in a significant way (and perhaps even more so than in previous eras), a certain degree of autonomy and self-awareness was developing, particularly among males of the middling and higher sorts.

However, one of the problems with this approach is that it relies on a reductive understanding of identity in the Middle Ages as entirely dependent on an affiliation to a particular social group or category. Whilst this form of self-identification may reflect medieval practice to an extent, it is worth pointing to several critical works that highlight the level of complexity that can be found in medieval introspective writing. Jeremy Tambling's *Confession*, for example, examines the development of identity and notions of the self through the practice of private confession. Tambling describes how the introduction of private confession in the Middle Ages led to individual identity becoming increasingly foregrounded as a result of subjugation to an authority. Of particular note here is the suggestion that confessional practices helped to shape the work of three authors: Dante, Petrarch, and Chaucer. Through analysis of Dante's *Commedia*, Petrarch's *Ascent of Mont*

1986); Joel Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); and John Lee, *Shakespeare's Hamlet and the Controversies of Self* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000).

[57] For Greenblatt, to 'fashion' in relation to identity is a term that first emerges during the early modern period (pp. 1-2). See, for example, Spenser's use of 'fashion' in his *Letter to Raleigh* (8). See also, Jason Scott-Warren, *Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), pp. 225-6.

Ventoux, and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Tambling demonstrates that all three works show evidence of a confessional rhetoric that emphasises a character's (or narrator's) ability to self-fashion.[58]

Alternatively, Lee Patterson's *Chaucer and the Subject of History* explores Chaucer's interest in individuality and the impact that both the past and society have on the formation of the self. For Patterson, a conflict between the needs of society and individual desire formed 'one of the great topics for literary exploration throughout the Middle Ages'.[59] This certainly rings true for many romances, in which the heroic quest narrative serves as a testing ground for young knights attempting to establish a balance between individual desire and the cultural expectations laid upon them by both church and state. Indeed, we see this juxtaposition of internal and external factors appearing as early as the twelfth century, as evidenced by the examples of Chrétien de Troyes' work explored in chapter two. As such, we must be careful about overstating the significance of the early modern period as a point at which a more modern concept of identity arose.

That being said, a more inward-looking approach to individuality was undoubtedly developing, particularly toward the Late Middle Ages and into the early modern period. Christianity in the Middle Ages was largely dominated by an Augustinian approach which argued that the purposeful development of the self, independent from God, led to ruin. Acknowledgement of the self thus relied on a recognition of the created order, and the moral condition of the individual was determined by turning away from the material and toward the immaterial (charity versus concupiscence).[60] Augustine's argument acknowledged the act of

[58] Jeremy Tambling, *Confession* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 46-56.

[59] Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 8.

[60] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 125-34.

self-identification as a process of looking inward, but only in the sense that such reflection drew attention to God. The dominant model throughout the Middle Ages thus differed from the early modern conception of the individual with its focus on self-sufficient knowledge and will. God was still an important factor, but a much greater emphasis was being placed on introspection during early modern period, an introspection that ultimately reduced the need for external, ambiguous, otherworldly beings to be used as a means of defining the self. Furthermore, as has been noted above by critics such as Wall, Lamb, and Buccola, the perception of identity in literature and popular culture increasingly took account of lower and middling sorts as well as nobles and the aristocracy. Accordingly, individuals no longer relied on 'an ancient family tradition or hierarchical status that might have rooted personal identity in the identity of a clan or caste'.[61] The formation of the self, in other words, did not depend on the same socio-religious structures that had governed much of its representation in romance during the Middle Ages. In effect, this development ultimately stole some of the power that faeries as a literary sign had for instigating the process of individuation in the hero's journey. Their function as ambiguous entities on the borders of Divine Law carried less weight in a society in which identity was increasingly defined as independent of the Divine. From an ontological perspective, faeries had become less unique, less 'other'.

The second variable worth considering here relates to changes in the perception of chivalry and knighthood between the Middle Ages and the early modern period. During the 1580-90s, chivalry in England experienced something of a revival, an attempt to reinvigorate society's championing of fighting men after a period of political and religious infighting.[62] This

[61] Greenblatt, p. 9.

[62] Arthur B. Ferguson has suggested that the politically turbulent reigns of Edward and Mary Tudor (and the beginnings of Elizabeth's rule) were 'far from conducive to chivalric idealism'. As such, chivalry only began to re-emerge as a desirable quality amongst the male aristocracy once the country had regained a certain

renewed interest was marked by an incorporation of chivalric practices into courtly entertainments in a way that had not been seen in the country since the reign on Henry VIII. During the 1580s, the Accession Day Tilts were first introduced as an annual celebration of the accession of Elizabeth I, incorporating both theatrical and chivalric elements in a performance that drew inspiration from the tournaments and jousts of the Middle Ages. Similarly, as has been evidenced in the previous chapter, Elizabeth's courtiers staged entertainments throughout the 1570s, '80s, and '90s which drew heavily from Arthurian romance and from its associated codes of honour. As a result of this trend, chivalry and medieval courtly etiquette became a popular means of glorifying Elizabeth in a wide range of poetic and artistic works from the period, including Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.

However, whilst chivalry was back in fashion for a time, its usefulness as part of an effective military strategy was less certain. Mounted knights were becoming increasingly outdated on the battlefield as the technology of war evolved, and the need for nobles to amass and coordinate their own fighting force had been made largely redundant as the state began to rely more heavily on permanent, professionally trained soldiers.[63] Skills such as riding, fencing, and jousting were seen as social activities (rather than an integral part of a warrior's training), and chivalry became increasingly about display rather than a means of channelling and controlling a section of society comprised of trained fighting men. Despite this, early modern chivalry remained dependent on the image of the medieval knight. Critics

amount of stability several decades into Elizabeth's reign. *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England* (London: Associated University Presses, 1986), p. 66.

[63] Arguments to this effect have been put forward by critics such as Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558–1642* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), and Sydney Anglo, *Chivalry in the Renaissance* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1990). However, see Matthew Woodcock, 'The End of Chivalry? Survivals and Revivals of the Tudor Age', in *A Companion to Chivalry*, ed. by Robert W. Jones and Peter Coss (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2019), pp. 281-300 for an argument suggesting that chivalry never had a 'golden age' and that accounts of its decline can be found throughout its history (including as early as the twelfth century).

such as Maurice Keen and Richard Cust have suggested that, whilst the outward appearance of chivalry was changing, many of its values – fidelity, charity, courage – continued to be an important part of the masculine, aristocratic ideal.[64] Nor was there any less emphasis placed on individual feats of heroism on the battlefield. If anything, 'the chivalric gestures had become more exaggerated as the actions of participants were shaped by heavily romanticised notions of what warfare should be like'.[65] Indeed, the image of the romance hero influenced the actions of knights on the battlefield to such an extent that individualism and proving oneself heroic was considered as important, if not more so, than the outcome of the conflict itself. One famous example of this is Philip Sidney at Zutphen in the Netherlands (1586), who rode heroically into battle without waiting to put his leg guards on and so died from a wound on his thigh. In a similarly reckless, although ultimately less tragic example, the Earl of Essex is reported to have single-handedly charged toward Lisbon as English forces were withdrawing from the besieged city in 1589, ramming his lance into the gate and demanding to tilt with any Spaniard who dared challenge him over the honour of his mistress.[66]

The cultural value of the chivalric ideal was also under greater scrutiny than it had been during the Middle Ages, in part because of the increasing ineffectiveness of the mounted knight, but also because of a developing frustration amongst many commentators about the rights and moral codes associated with chivalry. James Ortego, for example, emphasises this problematic view of knighthood in an article exploring early modern attitudes toward the Knights of the Garter, an order originally established in 1348 by Edward III.

[64] Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 238-53; Richard Cust, 'Chivalry and the English Gentleman', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Age of Shakespeare*, ed. by Malcolm Smuts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 458-76.

[65] Cust, pp. 464-6.

[66] Ibid.

> Although the high standards of the Garter remained a constant over the years, literary representations of knights and chivalry, especially in Shakespeare, continued to lament the decay of knighthood and the chivalric ethic. By the 1590s, common citizens were dubbed knights for little or no reason other than nepotism, often roaming the streets of London and frequently causing more harm than good, and even though Queen Elizabeth laboured to maintain the esteemed ideals of chivalry, the Garter knight of Shakespeare's day was frequently scrutinized in literature.[67]

Foremost amongst the instances that fuelled this belief in the deterioration of knighthood was the arbitrary knighting of twenty-four soldiers in Ireland by the Earl of Essex (the same who had charged the gates of Lisbon a decade earlier), an action that caused the aristocracy to complain about commoners entering their elite ranks and the commoners to complain about knights with no respect for the codes of honour that protected ordinary citizens from harm.[68]

Shakespeare was no exception when it came to the criticisms being levelled against knights and chivalry at this time. Ortego refers to the example of Talbot's speech in *I Henry*

[67] James N. Ortego II, 'Seeking the Medieval in Shakespeare: The Order of the Garter and the Topos of Derisive Chivalry', *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 35 (2010), p. 89.

[68] Ibid. See also, Richard McCoy, *The Rites of Knighthood* (London: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 79-102.

VI, in which Talbot criticises Fastolfe's status as a Garter Knight, condemning him for running from the battlefield and lamenting the fallen state of the Order:

> When first this order was ordain'd my lords,
> Knights of the Garter were of noble birth,
> Valiant and virtuous, full of haughty courage,
> Such as were grown to credit by the wars;
> Not fearing death, nor shrinking for distress,
> But always resolute in most extremes.
> He, then, that is not furnisht in this sort
> Doth but usurp the sacred name of knight,
> Profaning this most honourable order,
> And should – if I were worthy to be judge –
> Be quite degraded, like a hedge-born swain
> That doth presume to boast of gentle blood.
>
> (4.1.33-44)

Other instances of this kind of critique include Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*, who appear to have earned their knighthoods through money or affiliation rather than merit, and Elizabeth in *Richard III*, who comments on the degradation of the Garter order (a criticism that is not present in Shakespeare's sources for the play).[69]

[69] Ibid, pp. 93-4.

A critique of the valorisation of knighthood can also be found in Falstaff's famous speech in *I Henry IV*, in which he describes the many shortcomings of a life of honour.

> I would be loath to pay [God] before his day. What need I be so forward with him that calls not on me? Well, 'tis no matter; honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on? How then? Can honour set-to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word 'honour'? What is that 'honour'? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis invisible then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon. And so ends my catechism.
>
> (5.1.127-40)

Falstaff, a character who is both knight and tavern drunkard, thus functions as something of an anti-chivalric figure within the *Henry IV* plays. He operates (at least for half of the time) within a world in which the martial and moralistic values ascribed to chivalry are foregrounded in characters such as Hal, Hotspur, and Sir Walter Blunt, but he does not believe in those values himself. As such, he is able to draw attention to the futility of Sir Walter Blunt's death on the battlefield, declaring 'There's honour for you' (5.3.32-3) at the sight of Blunt's corpse, but his own debauched behaviour does not single him out as an example to be

followed either. In effect, his words and behaviour help to identify the flaws that exist within the chivalric ideal whilst not necessarily providing a workable alternative.[70]

Falstaff's anti-chivalric role also carries across to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, although it is perhaps less clear here than in his other appearances. In an attempt to highlight this connection, Ortego draws attention to the possibility that *Merry Wives* (or at least the faerie ceremony in Act V) was written for a Saint George's Day Garter Feast held in 1597.[71] As evidence for this, he cites Mistress Quickly's faerie queen speech, which references the Order of the Garter –

> And nightly, meadow-fairies, look you sing
> Like to the Garter's compass, in a ring.
> Th'expressure that it bears, green let it be,
> More fertile-fresh than all the field to see;
> And '*Hon soit qui mal y pense*' write
> In em'rald tufts, flowers purple, blue, and white
>
> (5.5.64-9)

[70] Harold Bloom raises a similar argument, suggesting that Falstaff's honour speech represents Shakespeare's attempt to educate 'a society still given to military fantasies'. However, by placing that criticism in the mouth of Falstaff Shakespeare effectively leaves it up to his audience to decide which side of the argument they are on. *Shakespeare* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), p. 295. Further studies on Shakespeare and honour include Curtis Brown Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1960); Paul N. Siegel, 'Shakespeare and the Neo-Chivalric Cult of Honor', *The Centennial Review*, Vol. 8, 1 (1964), pp. 39-70; and Norman Council, *When Honour's at the Stake* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973).

[71] Ortego, pp. 95-6. For more on the different theories related to the composition and original performance of *Merry Wives*, see Giorgio Melchiori's commentary in the Arden edition of the text. The Garter Feast theory refers to the possibility that *Merry Wives* was written for a celebration held at Westminster Palace on Saint George's day (1597) to celebrate the election of five knights – including George Carey (Lord Hunsdon), the patron of Shakespeare's company – to the Order of the Garter. Melchiori himself dismisses this theory, favouring instead the suggestion that *Merry Wives* was written after *Henry V*, sometime around 1599-1600. However, this does not negate the possibility that Shakespeare lifted Mistress Quickly's speech from a masque that was originally performed as part of the Garter feast celebrations. *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. by Giorgio Melchiori (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2000), pp. 1-3.

– and may have been included specifically as an address to those present at the feast.[72] Accordingly, Falstaff's shaming at the hands of the Windsor faeries functions as a criticism of the members of the Garter Order. As Ortego suggests, 'Falstaff suffers comical torments for his courtship of Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford, but the "scornful rhymes" [of the faeries] signify Shakespeare's social commentary on the diminishment of the chivalric code'.[73]

However, we do not necessarily need to tie *Merry Wives* to the Garter feast in order for it to function as a commentary on the values of knighthood. The criticisms that are levelled against Falstaff throughout the play highlight characteristics which actively distance him from the heroic knights of romance and from the culture of youthful gallantry that existed amongst the early modern nobility. Mistress Page, for example, finds it absurd that 'One that is well-nigh worn to pieces with age, to show himself a young gallant' (2.1.17-8) and criticises Falstaff for thinking that the Windsor wives would 'thrust virtue out of [their] hearts' to serve his lust (5.5.46); Justice Shallow holds Falstaff to account for actions that are distinctly unknightly, complaining 'Knight, you have beaten my men, killed my deer, and broke open my lodge' (1.1.104-5); and Falstaff himself declares his unsuitability for wilderness adventures, complaining of his 'alacrity in sinking' (3.5.11-2) when he is thrown into the Thames, and describing himself as the fattest stag in Windsor forest (5.5.12-3). In addition, Falstaff's desire to close his eyes to the danger that faeries present – 'I'll wink and couch: no man their work must eye' (5.5.48) – suggests a lack of valour that aligns him with Fastolfe in *I Henry VI*, or Sir

[72] For Ortego, the inclusion of the Garter's motto – '*Hon soit qui mal y pense*' ('Evil be to him who thinks evil') – 'leaves little doubt that the playwright had the Order of the Garter in mind when drafting *The Merry Wives of Windsor*' (p. 103).

[73] Ibid, p. 96.

Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*.[74] Falstaff, like both of these examples, is a knight who has not merited his title through acts of chivalry, a knight for whom honour or courage are less appealing than a 'pottle of sack' (3.5.27). His disregard for the values of chivalry, his lack of honour, and his inability to demonstrate martial prowess are thus characteristics that make him an appealing figure of ridicule for Shakespeare's Windsor wives and, subsequently, an ideal candidate for torment at the hands of Windsor's pseudo-faeries.

In light of this, and whilst *Merry Wives* is not generally numbered amongst Shakespeare's romances, Falstaff's encounter with the faeries in Act V does exhibit some traits that we might readily associate with romance.[75] After all, this is a story in which a would-be lover and knight ventures into a forest alone and encounters strange and supernatural entities who challenge his courage and his moral fortitude. There is also a sense that, as with many romance heroes, the acquisition of Falstaff's romantic desire is tied to the inheritance of wealth and notoriety; Falstaff is just as interested in Ford's 'purse' and his 'legion of angels' (1.3.48) as he is in seducing Ford's wife.[76] Accordingly, Falstaff's entry into the forest, dressed as Herne the Hunter, serves to parody the conventions of Arthurian romance and draw attention to his unsuitability to fulfil the role of questing knight. As with Dapper in Jonson's *The Alchemist*, Shakespeare is using motifs associated with the faerie quest narrative as a

[74] The suggestion that one should not look at faeries also draws on folkloric tradition. This belief is most commonly linked to will-o'-the-wisps or jack-o'-lanterns, spirits who would mislead unwary travellers by shining lights over bogs or marshes. Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft* (Oxford: Facts On File, 1989), p. 176.

[75] As Laurence Publicover has argued in a recent study on the Mediterranean and the early modern stage, many plays that we would not necessarily class as romance still 'negotiate romance matters'. Publicover's argument focuses on a number of examples (Philip Massinger's *Believe As You List*, Thomas Kyd's *Soliman and Perseda*, Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Thomas Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West*, and *The Travels of the Three English Brothers*) that 'treat romance not so much as a genre to be inhabited[...], but instead a mode whose strategies can be adopted and adapted'. *Dramatic Geography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 63.

[76] An 'angel' was a common term for a gold coin, worth ten shillings, stamped with the figure of the archangel Michael. *Merry Wives*, p. 149, n. 50.

means of highlighting certain moral and ethical shortcomings within the character: in this case, an absence of the virtuous qualities and martial abilities that pertain to chivalry.

Of course, the pseudo-faeries of *Merry Wives* are still largely derived from the kind of folklore and superstition that was commonly associated with female domestic servants. They visit maidens in their sleep, bringing sweet dreams to those who have said their prayers and pinching those who 'think not on their sins' (5.5.49-54). As in *Dream*, these are faeries associated with Hobgoblins, with domestic chores – 'fires thou find'st unraked and hearths unswept' – and with flowers (5.3.41, 44, 70-3). They dance in a ring around an oak, and there is even something approaching a changeling narrative in Fenton's stealing away of Anne Page to be married. In these respects, they are more closely tied to folklore and superstition than Jonson's faerie queen. But these are also faeries who have come to challenge the moral aptitude of a knight.

Quickly. With trial fire touch me his finger end:
If he be chaste, the flame will back descend
And turn him to no pain; but if he start,
It is the flesh of a corrupted heart.
Pistol. A trial, come.
Evans. Come, will this wood take fire?
They put the tapers to his fingers, and he starts.
Falstaff. O, o, o!
Quickly. Corrupt, corrupt, and tainted in desire!
About him, fairies, sing a scornful rhyme,
And, as you trip, still pinch him to your time.

(5.5.84-92)

The emphasis here, as in Jonson's *The Alchemist*, centres on punishing a character for his transgressions, rather than testing his virtues. Likewise, *Merry Wives* places no real emphasis on a moral theme. By the play's conclusion, all misdeeds have been forgiven and all characters are reunited in friendship.[77] If there is a lesson to be learned here, it is that 'Wives may be merry and yet honest too' (4.2.100), but the main beneficiary of this knowledge is Ford, who ultimately realises the error of his jealousy. Falstaff, whilst certainly dejected by the play's conclusion, shows no evidence of moral transformation or spiritual revelation. Indeed, despite his flaws, he is welcomed back into the community with no sense of the liminal transformation that generally accompanies romance heroes.

However, the roles played by Mistress Ford and Mistress Page in Falstaff's humiliation still share some interesting parallels with the faerie test narratives of romance. Indeed, we might even argue that their part in instigating the three pranks places them as surrogates for the more conventional romance faerie. There is certainly a resemblance to Lady Bertilak's three attempts to seduce Sir Gawain in the three opportunities the merry wives give Falstaff to demonstrate his indecency. There is even something bordering on Chaucerian in the transformation of Falstaff from knight to old hag after his second attempt to woo Mistress Ford. In this respect, the two wives assume the mantle of moral arbiters within the story, a role traditionally associated with faeries in medieval romance. The knight who ventures into

[77] By point of contrast, tragic plays such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, or *Doctor Faustus* engage readily with moral themes and liminality whilst incorporating supernatural entities that seem to have been considered more fitting for their genre and subject matter (King Hamlet's ghost, Macbeth's witches, and the demon Mephistopheles all serve a more readily apparent moral purpose within their respective plays). However, it is also worth noting that Shakespeare tends to avoid the kind of moral endings found in plays like *Faustus*, favouring more ambiguous conclusions in much of his work. For more on this, see Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), p. 126.

their domain is put to the test through a series of challenges that ultimately leads him to the otherworldly setting of the forest. Within this forest, Falstaff's shortcomings and his relationship to certain chivalric ideals (both as a courtly lover and a courageous adventurer) are brought into question. Whilst he shows no evidence of personal transformation as a result of his encounter, Shakespeare's adaptation of romance convention in this way still draws the audience's attention to this problematic image of knighthood. As in *I Henry IV*, Falstaff is used to highlight certain limitations of the chivalric ideal, but in this instance, he undergoes a more rigorous testing in line with the function of faerie encounters in romance.

In *Merry Wives* the faerie sign does not appear to function as a means of instigating a process of change or self-discovery within the protagonist, as it does in the examples explored elsewhere in this thesis. As attested earlier in this section, approaches to individuality in the early modern period suggest that this particular function of the faerie sign in romance was less relevant during Shakespeare's time. However, what remains consistent here is the close relationship that faeries have with the shaping of masculine courtly ideals in literature. As in the works of Chrétien de Troyes, themes and motifs associated with the faerie sign in *Merry Wives* provide a useful means of engaging with the conventions of courtly society. By drawing on romance in this way, Shakespeare incorporated an additional layer of meaning into a comedy about a wayward knight's refusal to conform to certain chivalric values (values that he also interrogates in *I Henry IV* and in other plays).

The examples explored in this chapter demonstrate that romance continued to influence faeries in early modern drama to a greater extent than is generally acknowledged amongst critics. In each case, the faeries that appear in these plays feature certain themes and motifs that are attributed to the faerie sign, such as their appearance in liminal wilderness

settings, their excessive wealth and beauty, their association with courtly convention, and their role as arbiters of human action. However, this is also a period of significant change regarding the appearance and function of the faerie sign. Whilst some element of an older medieval tradition has been retained here, it is important to acknowledge the different approaches to faeries that appear in each of these texts. In the case of *Guy, Earl of Warwick*, the author shows an awareness of the regularity with which faeries appeared in romance through his inclusion of Oberon and his faerie troop, but the function and meaning associated with the faerie sign has been significantly diminished. Their purpose within the play is largely decorative and they lack the narrative tension that is commonly associated with their appearance in romance. For Ben Jonson, some awareness of romance convention is retained through the courtly image of the faerie queen and her role as an arbiter of human action, but he also subverts this image to draw attention to the greed and social aspirations of a middle-class law clerk and the three cozeners who are attempting to deceive him. Likewise, whilst Shakespeare's faeries do provide some evidence of attributes that derive from romance, they are also an amalgamation of different ideas from classical, medieval, folkloric, and other sources, while also being developed through a significant contribution from the author's own creative imagination. The examples explored in this chapter thus draw attention to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as a period in which the faerie sign becomes fragmented and is increasingly put to different purposes within literature and popular culture. Indeed, as the conclusion to this thesis will briefly attest, the faeries that postdate this period take on new meanings and functions that further distance them from the medieval conventions of the faerie sign.

Conclusion:

After the faerie sign

For roughly four hundred years, from the end of the twelfth century to the beginning of the seventeenth century, the faerie sign existed as a set of recognisable conventions within romance that could be used to signify an otherworldly encounter. These conventions allowed for a degree of ambiguity that frequently left the exact nature of characters and locations unclear, and this ambiguity served to heighten audiences' awareness of the competing personal, social, and religious values that were often the focal point of meaning within romance. In effect, faeries served as useful devices that allowed authors to cast a degree of uncertainty over the protagonist's development toward a particular image or ideal. However, the themes and motifs that are associated with the faerie sign in romance also predate the earliest romance authors; ambiguous otherworldly characters and settings first appear in written form in early-medieval Celtic literatures that draw from much older traditions of Celtic folklore and mythology. These early examples of the faerie sign establish many of the visual signifiers that are used to identify faeries, at least until the seventeenth century, but the connection that faeries have to aristocratic knightly ideals in the works of romance authors does not feature as prominently within these stories. In addition, the regularity with which faeries in romance were identified using certain repeated themes and motifs, and the subsequent familiarity that both authors and audiences had for the faerie sign, resulted in its ability to transgress genre boundaries and to serve as a useful means of commenting on personal, social, or religious values in other works. In these examples, faerie conventions are

adapted to suit new meanings, but the authors who included them did so with an awareness of the intertextual tradition upon which they were building.

In the first two examples covered in this thesis, *Immram Brain* and *Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed*, we see early evidence of the themes and motifs that would come to define the appearance of faeries in romance. In *Brain*, the Land of Women serves as an otherworldly landscape that both mirrors Bran's kingdom and represents a superlative, otherworldly example of early medieval aristocratic life. The island's otherworldliness is identified most clearly through the beauty of its inhabitants, the boundlessness of its harvests, and the complete absence of death and disease found there. Conventions such as time distortion within the otherworldly realm also relate *Brain* to later examples found in romance. But the function of the Land of Women as an ambiguous otherworldly space differs from romance in that the author appears to be using this setting to highlight a tension between Celtic and Christian traditions, tantalising his audience with images of a Pagan otherworld whilst emphasising the danger of Bran's entry into the Land of Women in terms of his separation from humanity and from God. *Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed* draws on a similar tension between Celtic mythology and Christian tradition, using the otherworldly landscapes and peoples that Pwyll encounters to establish his reputation as a ruler. In effect, Pywll is presented as a great person because he is deemed worthy of otherworldly attention. However, as in *Brain*, the author of *Pwyll* utilises the ambiguity of the otherworldly realm in a way that identifies it as both advantageous and dangerous to the story's protagonist.

In the works of Chrétien de Troyes, the conventions of the faerie sign are integrated into individual heroic quest narratives that engage with themes of self-discovery and the conflicting values that form the chivalric ideal. In this context, the ambiguity that Chrétien invests otherworldly settings and characters with serves to destabilise our own ability to

comprehend the 'correct' path. In the examples of Mabonagrain in *Erec et Enide* and the Fisher King in *Le Conte du Graal*, it is only through the hero's ability to demonstrate personal growth that a degree of rationalisation or explanation is given to these otherworldly characters. For the most part, however, Chrétien maintains the ambiguity of his otherworldly spaces, and in so doing, he allows them to serve as testing grounds for the difficult moral, ethical, or social choices that Chrétien's protagonists are often required to make.

The faerie sign is employed in a similar fashion in the works of the *Gawain*-poet, where the ambiguity associated with faeries serves to complicate the protagonist's, and also the audience's, ability to interpret certain characters and settings. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the ontology of the Green Knight and the otherworldly status of Hautdesert are both open to continual interpretation and debate. As in the works of Chrétien de Troyes, the ambiguity of the faerie sign is closely tied to the difficult choices that Gawain must make in pursuit of an idealised image of knighthood. Its presence effectively serves to highlight the complexity of Gawain's situation. In *Pearl*, the *Gawain*-poet uses the faerie sign to limit our comprehension of the poem's setting in much the same way. However, whilst ambiguity remains a defining feature of the faerie sign's presence, it has a clearer didactic function within this religious dream vision than in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or the works of Chrétien de Troyes. In the early stages of *Pearl*, the dream landscape exhibits both Edenic and faerie-like qualities, leaving both the dreamer and the audience in some doubt as to its exact nature. It is only through the direct interjection of the Pearl Maiden, an agent and mouthpiece of Christ, that the purpose of the dreamer's vision is revealed. The faerie sign thus plays an important part in establishing one of the poem's central ideas: a belief in humanity's limited ability to comprehend God and Heaven without the aid of divine revelation.

In *The Faerie Queene*, Edmund Spenser continues a tradition of using faeries to explore the complex interplay between different knightly (or gentlemanly) virtues. However, in the context of Spenser's allegory it is the audience themselves who are being asked to navigate through the uncertain landscapes of Gloriana's faerie land. The ambiguity that exists within the poem derives in large part from the way that Spenser often plays with the conventions of romance, incorporating influences from a much wider range of sources, including Elizabethan pageants, Reformist doctrine, and classical mythology. Spenser draws on different early modern interpretations of the term faerie, such as sprites and witches' familiars, antiquarian nature spirits, and changelings. By incorporating competing images of what a faerie is within *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser asks his audience to consider potentially problematic interpretations of faeries whilst simultaneously using them to glorify his sovereign. In effect, as with the examples cited above, this diversification of the faerie sign serves to intentionally complicate the protagonist's journey toward a more idealised state. However, despite the complexity and depth of Spenser's imagined faerie realm, the process of identifying the correct path in this instance depends on our ability to recognise the virtues that are outlined in each book.

The diversification of the faerie sign during the early modern period impacted other genres too. During the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, folkloric belief and rural or domestic superstition gradually came to dominate the way that faeries were portrayed, particularly on the stage. In the case of Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*, for example, Dapper's encounter with the faerie queen is presented as a con. The faerie woods, islands, and castles of romance are replaced here by a London townhouse, whilst the subject of the encounter is no knight, but a middle-class law clerk who is being stripped of his money and possessions by the play's three central cozeners: Subtle, Ford, and Doll. In Shakespeare's

Merry Wives, the faeries are also a deception performed by humans. The townsfolk of Windsor dress up as faeries to punish Falstaff for his transgressions, and the manner in which they do so draws heavily from folklore and rural superstition: these are faeries who dance in rings, who carry out domestic chores, and who pinch the corrupt and the sinful. However, in both *The Alchemist* and *Merry Wives*, some aspect of the faerie sign as it appears in romance is retained. This is particularly true of the way that both authors use faeries to engage with themes of aristocracy and knighthood within each play. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that faeries challenge the virtues of the knightly protagonists who encounter them, and this is still true for Dapper and Falstaff. However, neither of these two characters are expected to prosper from their encounter with faeries. Instead, both Jonson and Shakespeare engage with the conventions of the faerie sign to draw attention to each characters' vices and moral failings.

Throughout all of the examples explored in this thesis, then, the incorporation of themes and motifs pertaining to the faerie sign highlight each authors' intertextual engagement with a tradition of ambiguous otherworldly beings who serve to mirror and challenge the cultural, political, or religious ideals of the protagonist's (and also the audience's) society. What this thesis has demonstrated is that, in addition to the more conventional examples of faerie romance – *Sir Orfeo*, *Huon de Bordeaux*, *Ogier le Danois*, Jean d'Arras' *Melusine* – the themes and motifs of the faerie sign can be identified across a wide range of medieval and early modern texts. In both periods, the widespread familiarity of the faerie sign allowed authors to incorporate its associated themes and motifs into their work as a means of challenging certain knightly or aristocratic ideals, whilst the ambiguity and versatility of faeries themselves allowed authors to adapt them to suit a range of different literary contexts.

However, from the seventeenth century onward, faeries in English literature began to take on new forms and to convey new meanings. As a means of concluding this thesis, it is worth briefly highlighting some aspects of the appearance and function of faeries in later literatures that serve to demonstrate how faeries changed and adapted to new tastes and trends in the centuries that followed. As the final two chapters of this thesis have demonstrated, faeries were already subject to a wide range of new influences and interpretations by the time that Spenser, Shakespeare, and Jonson were writing faerie characters into their work. Indeed, the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries mark a significant turning point in our understanding of faeries, just as it heralds some important changes for romance as a mode. Chivalric romances remained popular throughout most of the seventeenth century, but whilst the storylines of romance appeared endlessly generative, incorporating easily identifiable plotlines and conventions that made them accessible to a wide range of readers, critical tastes during this period (in Britain at least) had begun to shift in a new direction.[1] The chivalric ideals that these stories depicted were becoming increasingly anachronistic, and the supernatural encounters that so often defined Arthurian romance quests were falling out of fashion as a taste for realism in fiction began to take precedence amongst the educated classes.[2]

[1] As Barbara Fuchs has argued, 'the marginalisation of romance as a lesser form begins at exactly the same point that it achieves its broad popularity via print circulation' (*Romance*, p. 97).

[2] As early as the fourteenth century, authors like Chaucer, Gower, and Langland were beginning to think of romance as a tired and outdated literary mode. See Putter, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and French Arthurian Romance*, p. 1. However, Gillian Beer talks about *Don Quixote* (originally published in 1605) as a watershed moment in the history of romance. For Beer, the text plays on the tension that exists between the idealised world of romance and reality, allowing Cervantes to revel in the delights of romance, whilst also casting an ironic light on an increasingly anachronistic heroic ideal and the mode's reliance on established tropes (*The Romance*, pp. 39-42). See Fuchs (pp. 105-17) for an account of the marginalisation of romance during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the rise of the novel as a more socially acceptable form of literature for the educated classes. However, for an account of the difficulty of distinguishing between the terms 'romance' and 'novel' in practice, see Michael Schmidt, *The Novel* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 11-12.

Themes and motifs associated with the faerie sign in romance – particularly their mirroring of aristocratic courtly life – continued to play an important part in audiences' understanding of what constituted a faerie. However, as faeries became less closely tied to the heroic quest narratives that had largely defined their appearance in literature for the previous five hundred years, faerie land ceased to function as an ambiguous space in which courtly ideals could be challenged. Instead, faeries took on new roles and conventions that adapted their appearance and function in literature into something that more closely resembles a modern understanding of the term 'fairy'.

Foremost amongst these changes was a growing taste amongst poets for increasingly diminutive fairies, a trend started by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but one that grew in popularity until it became a widely accepted characteristic of fairy ontology. Indeed, this approach to fairies became so pervasive amongst authors that it gradually superseded many of the attributes commonly associated with faeries in romance and folklore to become their most defining characteristic.[3] In addition to their tiny size, these fairies were defined by their pleasant demeanour and an absence of wicked or morally ambiguous qualities. Minor Latham, for example, argues that in *Dream*, only the rulers of fairy land – Oberon and Titania – retain any sense of the 'formidable powers and uncertain tempers' of medieval faeries.[4] Puck retains a connection to folkloric fairies through the part he plays in misleading and frightening the humans who enter into the fairy forest, but otherwise the fairy characters of *Dream* are entirely harmless.

[3] Whilst medieval writers such as Walter Map, Gerald of Wales and the author of *Huon de Bordeaux* do give accounts of faeries who are childlike in stature, these faeries do not come close to the tiny faeries found in the works of Shakespeare and subsequent authors.

[4] Minor Latham, *The Elizabethan Fairies*, p. 180.

> Diminutive, pleasing, and picturesque sprites, with small garden names and small garden affairs, associated with moon-beams and butterflies, they present themselves as a new race of fairies, as different from the popular fairies of tradition as are those fairies from the fays of medieval romance.[5]

Shakespeare, it seems, had effectively invented (or at least made popular from sources unknown) a new breed of literary fairy. Fairy land in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was not a place to be feared. Indeed, as Latham attests, Bottom is able to enter into the fairy realm, even reaching as far as the fairy queen's bower, and yet emerge completely unharmed and unaltered by his experience: a sequence of events unheard of in romance.[6]

This taste for miniature, benevolent fairies continued to grow in popularity, finding its most ardent supporters amongst a small group of poets and friends comprised of Michael Drayton, William Browne, Robert Herrick, and the less well-known Simon Steward.[7] These poets, Drayton and Herrick in particular, were captivated by Shakespeare's descriptions of 'elves' who 'Creep into acorn cups' (*Dream*, 2.1.30-1) and fairy chariots made from insect parts (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1.4.55-70), and the fairies they wrote about in turn became 'miracles of littleness and often very little else'.[8]

---

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid, pp. 183-4. Diane Purkiss has put forward a similar argument, suggesting that 'The fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are far more kindly and benevolent, far less dangerous, than the fairies of medieval romance, and they are also much more manageable than the fairies of witch trials, English or Scottish' (*Troublesome Things*, p. 180).

[7] Latham, pp. 201-14; Katharine Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck*, p. 56.

[8] Briggs, p. 47.

Perhaps the best-known example of this is Drayton's *Nymphidia*, a poem that focuses almost exclusively on the spectacle of a miniature fairy land, complete with castles made of spider's legs and cat's eyes (41-8), and chariots made of snail shell and cricket's bones (137-45).[9] There is some acknowledgement of a connection between fairies and romance within the poem, most notably in Drayton's reference to Chaucer's *Sir Thopas* in the opening line and in the story itself, which centres on a love affair between a fairy knight (Pigwiggen) and his queen (Mab). However, the main source for Drayton's fairy land is Shakespeare's plays. In particular, the description of Mab's fairy train, complete with fairies named 'Drop', 'Pin', 'Tick', and 'Nit' who ride around on the back of a grasshopper (161-76), establishes a connection to the fairies of Titania's bower in *Dream* – 'Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Mote, and Mustardseed' (3.1.154) – and to the description of Queen Mab's insect-drawn chariot in *Romeo and Juliet* (1.4.55-94). Unlike Shakespeare, though, these scenes become the primary focus of Drayton's poem, with descriptions of the paraphernalia of fairy land (including insect mounts, nut lodgings, cockle shell shields, and fish scale armour) repeated *ad nauseum* throughout the text. The fairies of *Nymphidia* do not mirror the human world as they do in romance (or even as they do in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), nor do they serve to test societal virtues or to enable the protagonist's journey toward self-discovery (as with Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, the protagonists of this story *are* the fairies). Instead, *Nymphidia* exists to allow Drayton to delight in descriptions of his quaint fairy world.[10]

[9] Michael Drayton, *The Works of Michael Drayton*, ed. by J. William Hebel, 5 Vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1932) III, pp. 125-46. See also, Drayton's *The Muses Elizium*, the second and third books of *Britannia's Pastorals* by William Browne, *Oberon's Palace* and *The Fairie Temple* by Robert Herrick, and *King Oberon's Apparel* by Simon Steward. See Latham (pp. 201-14) for a more detailed list of sources in which miniature faeries appear during this period.

[10] For J. R. R. Tolkien in his essay 'On Fairy-Stories', Drayton's *Nymphidia* was, as a tale about fairies, 'one of the worst ever written', due primarily to its lack of substance beyond its delight in the minute ('On Fairy-Stories', p. 319).

A similar approach to fairies can be seen in the works of Margaret Cavendish, whose poem *The Pastime, and Recreation of the Queen of Fairies in Fairy-land* features gnats who sing to Queen Mab whilst she rests beneath a flower (9-12) and a table made of mushroom with a tablecloth of spider's web (29-30).[11] Cavendish's *The Pastime of the Queen of Fairies* likewise delights in descriptions of the faerie queen's diminutive page, Tom Thumb.[12] Tom is small enough to hide inside coin purses, and he can disguise himself as a piece of fat within a pudding so that he 'almost chokes the Eater' (50) when swallowed. Cavendish writes that, once he is within a person's gut, 'their wind blowes out, / Putting the standers by into a rout' (51-2). Tom is therefore closer in character and function to Shakespeare's mischievous Puck than he is to fairies like Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Mote, and Mustardseed.[13] However, his size still derives from a taste for miniature fairies that is representative of the fairy poetry of this period.

Despite these examples, miniature faeries still functioned as mirror images of society in some poetic works during this period. For instance, as Regina Buccola has observed, a number of authors during the early-to-mid seventeenth century used diminutive fairies as a means of commenting on the religio-political divisions within England at this time.[14] One such example is Robert Herrick's *The Fairie Temple* (published in his 1648 collection *Hesperides*), in which the trappings and practices of the Catholic Church are incorporated into descriptions

[11] Margaret Cavendish, *Poems, and fancies written by the Right Honourable, the Lady Margaret Newcastle* (London: Printed by T.R. for J. Martin, and J. Allestrye, 1653), p. 151.

[12] Ibid, pp. 153-5.

[13] Tom is the friend and accomplice of a character who is referred to only as 'Hobgoblin' (30): a faerie trickster who can turn himself into 'Horse, Cow, Tree, or Stool' (34), who can 'hinder Butter's coming in the Churne' (38), and who holds up 'Hens Rumps' to prevent them from laying (41).

[14] Buccola, *Fairies, Fractious Women and the Old Faith*, pp. 55-6.

of a miniature fairy world that is heavily influenced by the diminutive fairies of Shakespeare's plays. Herrick writes,

> Hard by, i'th'shell of halfe a nut,
> The Holy-water there is put:
> A little brush of Squirrils haires,
> (Compos'd of odde, not even paires)
> Stands in the Platter, or close by,
> To purge the Fairie Family.
> Neere to the Altar stands the Priest,
> There off'ring up the Holy-Grist:
> Ducking in Mood, and perfect Tense,
> With (much-good-do't him) reverence.
> The Altar is not here foure-square,
> Nor in a forme Triangular;
> Nor made of glasse, or wood, or stone,
> But of a little Transverce bone;
> Which boyes, and Bruckel'd children call
> (Playing for Points and Pins) *Cockall*.
>
> (44-59) [15]

[15] Robert Herrick, *The Poetical Works of Robert Herrick*, ed. by L. C. Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956) p. 91.

Here, as in approaches to fairy belief adopted by sixteenth-century protestant reformers such as Reginald Scot and James VI, Herrick establishes a connection between fairies and the Catholic Church as a means of linking Catholicism to superstitious belief. In addition, Herrick plays on the spectacle of a minute fairy world in order to satirise Catholic rituals. Sacraments are performed using nuts and squirrel-hair brushes, and priests preach from altars that are made from small, discarded animal bones used in children's games. The association being made between fairies and Catholicism within the poem thus serves to diminish (in a fairly literal sense) the power and authority of the Catholic Church.

Fairies were not exclusively tied to anti-Catholic sentiment either. In Richard Corbet's *Farewell, Rewards and Fairies*, Corbet wryly mourns the loss of folkloric fairy traditions in early seventeenth-century England: a loss that he relates to the rise of Puritanism and an increase of puritan prohibitions within the country. Corbet, an English clergyman who was appointed as Bishop of Norwich just a few years before his death in 1635, still associates fairies with the prayers and processions of the Catholic Church:

> By which we note the Fairies
> Were of the old profession;
> Their songs were 'Ave Mary's',
> Their dances were procession.
> But now, alas, they all are dead;
> Or gone beyond the seas;
> Or farther for religion fled;

Or else they take their ease.[16]

In Corbet's poem, however, the faeries have been replaced by an emerging generation of Puritans who have taken things to the opposite extreme: driving all merriment and good sense from the land. Of particular note is Corbet's final lament to the fairies – 'Oh how the commonwealth doth want / Such Justices as you' – in which he appears to acknowledge the reduced role that fairies played in seventeenth-century oral and literary culture as arbiters of human action. There are no fairies left, he suggests mockingly, to keep people in line through pinching or with rewards for good behaviour.[17]

As a taste for realism in literature continued to develop into the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, fairies were increasingly defined in terms that emphasised their relationship to spectacle and to the imagination. Certainly, by the time John Dryden was writing *King Arthur* (1691), fairies were linked to a form of literature that served primarily to emphasise the imaginative capabilities of the author. In a dedicatory letter to George Savile, Marquis of Halifax, Dryden discussed his first patroness the Duchess of Monmouth's reaction to an early version of his semi-opera. He recounted that 'the parts of the Airy and Earthly Spirits, and that Fairy kind of writing, which depends only upon the Force of Imagination, were the Grounds for her liking the Poem, and afterwards of her Recommending it to the Queen'.[18]

---

[16] Richard Corbet, *Farewell, Rewards and Fairies*, in *The Oxford Library of English Poetry*, ed. by John Wain, 3 Vols. (London: Guild Publishing, 1987), I, p. 228.

[17] After Corbet, fairies continued to be used, for a brief while at least, as a means of attacking Puritan values and beliefs. Buccola, for example, argues that the anti-Catholic sentiment associated with fairies in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was pushed aside by the divide that emerged between the Royalists and the more puritan Parliamentarians during the 1640s: 'By that time, it had become common for Royalists to express their political views from behind the thin veil of fairy pseudonyms such as Robin Goodfellow' (p. 57).

[18] John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. by Edward Niles Hooker, H. T. Swedenburg, and Vinton A. Dearing, 20 Vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956-2000), XVI, p. 7.

In was from this letter that essayist and poet Joseph Addison later adapted the phrase 'Fairy kind of writing' to signify an entirely imaginative literary pursuit. In a series of essays for *The Spectator* titled 'The Pleasures of the Imagination' (1712), Addison wrote that

> There is a kind of writing, wherein the poet quite loses sight of nature, and entertains his reader's imagination with the characters and actions of such persons as have many of them no existence, but what he bestows on them. Such are fairies, witches, magicians, demons, and departed spirits. This Mr. Dryden calls 'the fairy way of writing', which is, indeed, more difficult than any other that depends on the poet's fancy, because he has no pattern to follow in it, and must work altogether out of his own invention.[19]

As Kevin Pask has suggested, Addison's essay represents an important milestone regarding critical perceptions of fairies in literature. For Pask, 'the phrase served to name not a new form of writing but a new conceptual basis for what we might call fantasy fictions'.[20] In effect, it helped to enforce a distinction between realistic and fantastical literature that still exists to this day. The 'fairy way of writing', much like romance itself, increasingly represented a more primitive form of literary expression. Fairies were no longer a topic for sophisticated adult

[19] Joseph Addison, *Critical Essays from the Spectator by Joseph Addison*, ed. by Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 199-200.

[20] Kevin Pask, *The Fairy Way of Writing* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), p. 57.

literature and so, as time passed, they gradually became the subjects of quaint pastoral tales and children's stories.[21]

Some attempt to explore an older faerie tradition can be seen in the works of writers and artists of the Romantic era – see, for example, John Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, in which Keats revives an antiquated tradition of knights in armour, and identifies the fairy maiden of the poem as a dangerous temptresses akin to those found in romance[22] – and the faerie sign also survives to some extent in ballads such as *Tam Lin*. However, faeries as they existed in the works of medieval and early modern romance authors were largely supplanted during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the winged, pixie-like characters of children's fairy tales. Some themes and motifs related to the identification of fairies might date back to the medieval conventions outlined in this thesis. For example, we still think of winged fairies as broadly human in appearance (if much smaller in size); they have retained an association with extreme beauty and ugliness; and they are still frequently connected to liminal spaces such as streams and forests. As I have touched on in the introduction to this thesis, a medieval conception of faeries has also been somewhat revived during the twentieth and twenty first centuries through fantasy literature. However, the ambiguous ontology that helped to define the faeries of medieval literature is a less prominent feature of their appearance. Instead, the fairies and elves that we find in modern fantasy often exhibit distinct social, moral, and racial attributes that allow authors and filmmakers to comment on

[21] Pask writes that, through Lockean notions of children's susceptibility to old wives' tales, the faeries of past oral and vernacular traditions were increasingly related to childlike belief and developing ideas about the idealisation of childhood, ultimately resulting in the expansive body of Victorian children's fairy tales (pp. 62, 80).

[22] John Keats, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, in *The Oxford Library of English Poetry*, II, pp. 500-1.

twentieth- and twenty-first-century concerns about race and cultural difference.[23] They still function as mirror images to humanity in much the same way that medieval faeries do, but they also tend to have a clearly defined taxonomy and place of origin: they are an identifiable race or species. Faeries as beings that are intentionally difficult to classify are rare in contemporary popular culture, and so the function of the faerie sign that I have explored in this thesis remains a uniquely medieval and early modern phenomenon.

[23] Examples of this include Andrzej Sapkowski's The Witcher series and the 2019 Amazon TV series *Carnival Row*, both of which situate elves/fairies as an oppressed race subjugated by a dominant human society. For more on the topic of race in fantasy literature, see Helen Young, *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

Editions

Annals of Ulster, *The*, ed. by Pádraig Bambury and Stephen Beechinor, *CELT: The Corpus of Electronic Texts* <https://celt.ucc.ie//published/T100001A/index.html> accessed 03.03.2020

Ascham, Roger, *English Works*, ed. William Aldis Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Auchinleck Manuscript, The, NLS Adv MS 19.2.1, <https://auchinleck.nls.uk/mss/reinbrun.html>, accessed 02.09.2019

Bernard de Clairvaux, *Œuvres completes, XXXI*, ed. and trans by Pierre-Yves Emery (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990)

Beowulf, ed. by George Jack (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994)

Beowulf, trans. by Seamus Heaney (London: Faber and Faber, 1999)

Bourchier, John, *The ancient, honorable, famous, and delighfull historie of Huon of Bourdeaux* (London: Thomas Purfoot, 1601)

Burchard of Worms, *Decretum*, CXL, 0971C, *Patrologia Latina Database*

Cavendish, Margaret, *Poems, and fancies written by the Right Honourable, the Lady Margaret Newcastle* (London: Printed by T.R. for J. Martin, and J. Allestrye, 1653)

Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)

Chrétien de Troyes, *Romans* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1994)

----------, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. by William W. Kibler and Carleton W. Carroll, revised edn. (London: Penguin, 2004)

Complete Story of the Grail, *The*, trans. by Nigel Bryant (Cambridge: Brewer, 2015)

Douglas, Gavin, *The Aeneid*, ed. by Gordon Kendal, 2 Vols. (London: MHRA, 2011)

Drayton, Michael, *The Works of Michael Drayton*, ed. by J. William Hebel, 5 Vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1932)

Dryden, John, *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. by Edward Niles Hooker, H. T. Swedenburg, and Vinton A. Dearing, 20 Vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956-2000)

Desiderius Erasmus, *Concerning the Aim and Method of Education*, ed. by William Harrison Woodward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904).

Gaimar, Geffrei, *Estoire des Englais / History of the English*, ed. and trans. by Ian Short (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Geoffrey de Charny, *The Book of Chivarly*, trans. and ed. by Richard Kaeuper and Elspeth Kennedy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996)

Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Vita Merlini*, ed. and trans. by Basil Clarke (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973)

Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, ed. and trans. by S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

Giraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, ed. by J. S. Brewer, James F. Dimock and George F. Warner, 8 Vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

Golding, Arthur, *Ovid's Metamorphosis*, ed. by John Frederick Nims (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2000)

Graelent, trans. by Eugene Mason (Cambridge, Ontario: In Parenthesis, 2001)

Gray, Scot Fitzgerald et al. (eds.), *Dungeon Master's Guide* (Renton: Wizards of the Coast, 2014)

Guibert de Nogent, *Gesta dei per Francos*, CLVI, 0685C, *Patrologia Latina Database*

Guy of Warwick, 1661, prep. by Helen Moore (Manchester: Manchester University Press for the Malone Society, 2007)

Herrick, Robert, *The Poetical Works of Robert Herrick*, ed. by L. C. Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956)

History of William Marshall, *The*, ed. by A. J. Holden, 2 Vols., ANTS 4-6 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2004)

Huon de Bordeaux, ed. by William W. Kibler and François Suard (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2003)

Immram Brain, ed. and trans. by Séamus Mac Mathúna (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1985)

Jean d'Arras, *Melusine*, ed. by A. K. Donald, EETS OS (London: Kegan Paul, 1895)

Jonson, Ben, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, general eds. David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson, 7 Vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

King James VI and I, *Daemonologie* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966)

Lacan, Jacques, *Écrits*, trans. by Bruce Fink (London: Norton, 2006)

Le Roman de Partonopeu de Blois, ed. and trans. by Olivier Collet and Pierre-Marie Joris (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2005)

Lewis, C. S., *The Chronicles of Narnia* (London: HarperCollins, 2001)

Llull, Ramon, *Llibre de L'Orde de Cavalleria*, a cura d'Albert Soler I Llopart (Barcelona: Editorial Barcino, 1988)

Lombard, Peter, *Sententiae In IV Libris Distinctae*, 2 Vols. (Rome: Colleggi S. Bonaventurae Ad Claras Aquas, 1971)

Mabinogion, *The*, trans. by Sioned Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

MacDonald, George, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, ed. by U. C. Knoepflmacher (London: Penguin, 1999)

Malory, Thomas, *Le Morte DArthur*, ed. by Stephen H. A. Shepherd (London: Norton, 2004)

Map, Walter, *De nugis curialium*, ed. and trans. by M. R. James, rev. by C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983)

Marie de France, *Œuvres Completes*, publiées par Yorio Otaka (Tokyo: Kazama, 1987)

----------, *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. and ed. by Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby, 2nd edn. (London: Penguin, 1999)

Marlowe, Christopher, *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Fredson Bowers, 2 Vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973)

Middle English Breton Lays, *The*, ed. by Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995)

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by David Raeburn (London: Penguin, 2004)

Ramon Lull's Book of Knighthood and Chivalry & the Anonymous Ordene de Chevalerie, ed. and trans. by Brian R. Price (Union City, California: The Chivalry Bookshelf, 2001)

Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune Printed from Five Manuscripts, *The*, ed. by James A. H. Murray, EETS OS 61 (London: Trübner, 1875)

Saint Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. by Henry Bettenson, intro. by G. R. Evans (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003)

Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, 61 Vols. (London: Blackfriars, 1968)

Scot, Reginald, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, intro. by Rev. Montague Summers (New York: Dover Publications, 1972)

Shakespeare, William, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. by Giorgio Melchiori (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2000)

----------, *The Complete Works*, general eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005)

Sir Gawain, ed. by Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995)

South English Legendary, *The*, ed. by Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J Mill, 3 vols., EETS OS 335, 336, 344 (London: Oxford University press, 1956)

Spenser, Edmund, *The Shorter Poems*, ed. by Richard A. McCabe (London: Penguin, 1999)

----------, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. by A. C. Hamilton et al., 2nd edn. (London: Pearson, 2007)

Stanzaic Guy of Warwick, ed. by Alison Wiggins (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004)

The brideling, sadling and ryding, of a rich churle in Hampshire, by the subtill practise of one Iudeth Philips (London: William Barley, 1595)

The Seuerall Notorious and levvd Cousnages of Iohn VVest, and Alice VVest (London: Edward Marchant, 1613)

Trial of Jeanne d'Arc, *The*, trans. by W. P. Barrett (London: Routledge, 1931)

Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, *Lanzelet*, trans. by Thomas Kerth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005)

Wain, John (ed.), *The Oxford Library of English Poetry*, 3 Vols. (London: Guild Publishing, 1987)

Works of the Gawain Poet, *The*, ed. by Ad Putter and Myra Stokes (London: Penguin, 2014)

Bibliography

Addison, Joseph, *Critical Essays from the Spectator by Joseph Addison*, ed. by Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970)

Aers, David, *Faith, Ethics and Church* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000)

Allen, Dorena, 'Orpheus and Orpheo', *Medium Ævum*, Vol. 33, 2 (1964), 102-11

Arested, Sverre, 'Spenser's Faery and Fairy', *Modern Language Quarterly*, Vol. 8, 1 (1947), 37-42

Arnold, Matthew, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1867)

Ashe, Laura, Ivana Djordjević and Judith Weiss (eds.), *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010)

Ashton, Gail, *Medieval English Romance in Context* (London: Continuum, 2010)

Asma, Stephen T., *On Monsters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Anglo, Sydney (ed.), *The Damned Art* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977)

----------, *Chivalry in the Renaissance* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1990)

Anwyl, Edward, 'The Value of the *Mabinogion* for the Study of Celtic Religion', in *Transactions of the Third International Congress for the History of Religions*, ed. P. S. Allen, 2 Vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908), II, 234-44

Auerbach, Erich, *Mimesis*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014)

Badcoe, Tamsin, *Edmund Spenser and the Romance of Space* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019)

Barber, Richard, *The Knight and Chivalry*, revised edn. (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995)

Barker, Francis, *The Tremulous Private Body* (Methuen: London, 1984)

Barnett, D. J., 'Chrétien's use of the supernatural', *English Studies in Africa*, Vol. 16, 2 (1973), 71-5

Barron, W. R. J., *Trawthe and Treason* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980)

Barton, Anne, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984)

Baskerville, C. R., 'The Genesis of Spenser's Fairy Queen', *Modern Philology*, Vol. 18, 1 (1920), 49-54

Beer, Gillian, *The Romance* (London: Methuen, 1970)

Belsey, Catherine, *The Subject of Tragedy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1985)

Bergeron, David M., 'The "I" of the Beholder', in *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, ed. by Jayne Elizabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring, and Sarah Knight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 142-60

Bernheimer, R. M., *Wild Men in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952)

Besserman, Lawrence, 'The Idea of the Green Knight', *English Literary History*, Vol. 53, 2 (1986), 219-39

Blake, Norman, *Middle English Religious Prose* (London: Arnold, 1972)

Bloom, Harold, *Shakespeare* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998)

Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Renate, Duncan Robertson, and Nancy Bradley Warren (eds.), *The Vernacular Spirit* (New York: Palgrave, 2002)

Brewer, Derek and Jonathan Gibson (eds.), *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997)

Brewer, Elizabeth, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1973)

Briggs, Katharine M., *The Anatomy of Puck* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959)

Bromwich, Rachel (ed.), *Trioedd Ynys Prydein, the Welsh Triads* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1978)

Brown, Arthur C. L., 'The Bleeding Lance', *PMLA*, Vol. 25, 1 (1910), 1-59

----------, *The Origin of the Grail Legend* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1943)

Bruckner, Matilda Tomaryn, *Chrétien Continued* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Buccola, Regina, *Fairies, Fractious Women and the Old Faith* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2006)

Bull, Steve, '*The Alchemist* and Medieval Faerie Romance', *Ben Jonson Journal*, Volume 26, 2 (2019), 206-226

Burckhardt, Jacob, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. by S.G.C. Middlemore, rev. and ed. by Irene Gordon (New York: New American Library, 1960)

Burdach, Konrad, *Der Gral* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1938)

Burrow, J. A., *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965)

----------, '*Sir Thopas* in the Sixteenth Century', in *Middle English Studies*, ed. by Douglas Gray and E. G. Stanley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 69-91

Butler, Martin, 'Jonson's London and its theatres', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson*, ed. by Richard Harp and Stanley Stewart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 15-29

Cameron, Euan, *Enchanted Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

Carasso-Bulow, Lucienne, *The Merveilleux in Chrétien de Troyes' Romances* (Genève: Libraire Droz, 1976)

Carney, James, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955)

Chambers, E. K., *Sir Henry Lee* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936)

Classen, Albrecht, 'The Epistemological Function of Monsters in the Middle Ages', *Lo Sguardo*, Vol. 9, 2 (2012), 13-34

Clopper, Lawrence M., 'The God of the *Gawain*-Poet', *Modern Philology*, Vol. 94, 1 (1996), 1-18

Coates, Alan, *English Medieval Books* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999)

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, *Of Giants* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999)

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (London: Constable, 1936)

Cooper, Helen, *The English Romance in Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

----------, ‘Guy of Warwick, Upstart Crows and Mounting Sparrows’, in *Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson: New Directions in Biography*, ed. by Takashi Kozuka and J. R. Mulryne (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006), 119-38

Council, Norman, *When Honour’s at the Stake* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973)

Cross, Roseanna, ‘’Heterochronia’ in *Thomas of Erceldoune*, *Guingamor*, ‘The Tale of King Herla’, and *The Story of Mediadoc, King of Cambria*’, *Neophilologus*, Vol. 92 (2008), 163-85

Cust, Richard, 'Chivalry and the English Gentleman', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Age of Shakespeare*, ed. by Malcolm Smuts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 458-76

Das, Nandini, *Renaissance Romance* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011)

Dillon, Myles, *Early Irish Literature* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1948)

----------, ‘Les sources irlandaises des romans arthuriens’, *Les Lettres Romanes*, Vol. 9 (1955), 143-59

Dinzelbacher, Peter, *Die Jenseitsbrucke im Mittelalter* (Vienna: Verband der wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaften Osterreichs, 1973)

Dollimore, Jonathan, *Radical Tragedy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984)

Donaldson, E. Talbot, *Speaking of Chaucer* (London: Athlone, 1970)

Donaldson, Ian, *Ben Jonson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)

Duby, Georges, ‘Dans la France du Nord-Ouest au XIIe siècle: les “jeunes” dans la société aristocratique’, *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, Vol. 19 (1964), 835–46

Duffy, Eamon, *The Stripping of the Altars* (London: Yale University Press, 1992)

Duggan, Joseph J., *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (London: Yale University Press, 2001)

Eagleton, Terry, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986)

Erickson, Wayne, *Mapping the Faerie Queene* (London: Garland, 1996)

Evans Wentz, W. Y., *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* (London: Froude, 1911)

Ferguson, Arthur, B., *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England* (London: Associated University Presses, 1986)

Field, Rosalind, Phillipa Hardman and Michelle Sweeney (eds.), *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010)

Fineman, Joel, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986)

Finlayson, John, '*Pearl*: Landscape and Vision', *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 71, 3 (1974), 314-43

Fourquet, Jean, 'Le Rapport entre l'œuvre et la source chez Chrétien de Troyes et le problème des sources bretonnes', *Romance Philology*, Vol. 9, 3 (1956), 298-312

Frappier, Jean, *Chrétien de Troyes et le mythe du graal* (Paris: Société d'Edition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1972)

----------, *Chrétien de Troyes*, trans. by Raymond J Cormier (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982)

Freedman, Paul, 'The Medieval Other', in *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles*, ed. by Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), 1-26

Freedman, Paul and Nancy Ovedovitz, *Out of the East* (London: Yale University Press, 2008)

Friedman, John Block, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000)

Friis-Jensen, Karsten and James M. W. Willoughby (eds.), *Peterborough Abbey* (London: The British Library, 2001)

Frye, Northrop, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957)

Fuchs, Barbara, *Romance* (London: Routledge, 2004)

Fulton, Helen (ed.), *A Companion to Arthurian Literature* (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009)

----------, 'Magic and the Supernatural in Early Welsh Arthurian Narrative', in *Arthurian Literature XXX*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and David F. Johnson (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013), 1-26

Furrow, Melissa, *Expectations of Romance* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2009)

Gazzard, Hugh, 'An Act to Restrain Abuses of Players (1606)', *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 61, 251 (2010), 495-528

Goth, Maik, *Monsters and the Poetic Imagination in The Faerie Queene* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015)

Green, Richard Firth, *Elf Queens and Holy Friars* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016)

Greenblatt, Stephen, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980)

Greenlaw, Edwin, 'Spenser's Fairy Mythology', in *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 15, 2 (1918), 105-22

Griffith, David, ‘The Seven Works of Mercy in the parish church.’, in *Patrons and Professionals in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Paul Binski and Elizabeth A. New (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2012), 292-315

Gruffydd, W. J., *Rhiannon* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1953)

Guiley, Rosemary Ellen, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft* (Oxford: Facts On File, 1989)

Hall, Alaric, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007)

Hall, Robert A., ‘The Silk Factory in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Yvain*’, *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 56, 6 (1941), 418-22

Hamilton, A. C., 'The Renaissance of the Study of the English Literary Renaissance', *ELR*, Vol. 25 (1995), 372-87

Hanning, Robert W., *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* (London: Yale University Press, 1977)

Harf-Lancner, Laurence, *Les Fées au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Champion, 1984)

----------, *Le Monde de Fées dans l’Occident medieval* (Paris: Hachette, 2003)

Hatt, Cecilia A., *God and the Gawain-Poet* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2015)

Hemming, Jessica, 'Reflections on Rhiannon and the Horse Episodes in "Pwyll"', *Western Folklore*, Vol. 57, 1 (1998), 19-40

----------, '*Bos Primigenius* in Britain: Or, Why Do Fairy Cows Have Red Ears?', *Folklore*, Vol. 113, 1 (2002), 71-82

Hibbard, Laura, ‘The Sword Bridge of Chrétien de Troyes and its Celtic Original’, *Romanic Review*, Vol. 4, 2 (1913), 166-90

Higgins, Anne, ‘Spenser Reading Chaucer: Another Look at the *Faerie Queene* Allusions’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 89, 1 (1990), 17-36

Highley, Christopher, *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Crisis in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

Hodges, Kenneth, 'Reformed Dragons', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 54, 1 (2012), 110-31

Hopkins, Andrea, *The Sinful Knights* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990)

Hutton, Ronald, ‘The Wild Hunt and the Witches' Sabbath’, *Folklore*, Vol. 125, 2 (2014), 161-78

----------, *The Witch* (London: Yale University Press, 2017)

Jaeger, C. Stephen, *The Origins of Courtliness* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985)

Jameson, Frederic, ‘Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre’, *New Literary History*, Vol. 7 (1975), 135-63

Kaeuper, Richard, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)

Keen, Maurice, *Chivalry* (London: Yale University Press, 1984)

----------, *Nobles, Knights and Men-At-Arms in the Middle Ages* (London: Hambledon Press, 1996)

Kelly, Douglas, 'Chrétien de Troyes: The Narrator and His Art', in *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. by Douglas Kelly (Lexington: French Forum, 1985), 13-47

Ker, W. P., 'The Craven Angels', *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 6 (1911), 85-7

King, Andrew, *The Faerie Queene and Middle English Romance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

Krappe, Alexander H., *The Science of Folk-Lore* (New York: The Dial Press, 1930)

Krueger, Roberta L. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

Lacy, Norris J. and Joan Tasker Grimbert, *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005)

Lamb, Mary Ellen, *The Popular Culture of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Jonson* (London: Routledge, 2006)

Lamb, Mary Ellen and Valerie Wayne (eds.), *Staging Early Modern Romance* (London: Routledge, 2009)

Latham, M. W., *The Elizabethan Fairies* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972)

Lee, John, *Shakespeare's Hamlet and the Controversies of Self* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000)

Le Goff, Jacques, *The Medieval Imagination* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988)

Lewis, C. S., *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936)

----------, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964)

Loomis, Roger Sherman, *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927)

----------, *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949)

----------, *The Grail* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963)

Lost Plays Database, <https://lostplays.folger.edu>, accessed May 8, 2019

MacCulloch, J. A., *Medieval Faith and Fable* (London: Harrap, 1932)

Maddox, Donald, *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

Maley, Willy, *Salvaging Spenser* (London: Macmillan, 1997)

Marshall, Peter, 'Deceptive appearances: ghosts and reformers in Elizabethan and Jacobean England', in *Religion and Superstition in Reformation Europe*, ed. by Helen Parish and William G. Naphy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 188-208

----------, 'Protestants and Fairies in Early-Modern England,' in *Living with Religious Diversity in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by C. Scott Dixon, Dagmar Freist, and Mark Greengrass (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 139-59

Marx, Jean, *La légende arthurienne et la grail* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952)

McCabe, Richard A., *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

McCoy, Richard, *The Rites of Knighthood* (London: University of California Press, 1989)

McCullen, J.T., 'Conference with the Queen of Fairies', *Studia Neophilologica*, Vol. 23 (1951), 87-95

McManus, Clare, 'Rank', in *Ben Jonson in Context*, ed. by Julie Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 245-53

Micha, Alexandre, *La tradition manuscrite des romans de Chrétien de* Troyes (Paris: Droz, 1939)

Morgan, Alison, *Dante and the Medieval Other World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

Muir, Lynette R., *Literature and Society in Medieval France* (London: Macmillan, 1985)

Mulready, Cyrus, *Romance on the Early Modern Stage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

Murrin, Michael, 'The Rhetoric of Fairyland', in *The Rhetoric of Renaissance Poetry From Wyatt to Milton*, ed. by Thomas O. Sloan and Raymond B. Waddington (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 73-95

Nagy, Joseph F., 'Close encounters of the traditional kind in medieval Irish literature', in *Celtic Folklore and Christianity*, ed. by Patrick K. Ford (Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin, 1983), 129-49

Newman, Barbara, *Medieval Crossover* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013)

Newstead, Helaine, *Bran the Blessed in Arthurian Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939)

Ní Bhrolcháin, Muireann, *An Introduction to Early Irish Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009)

Nievergelt, Marco, *Allegorical Quests* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2012)

Norbrook, David, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984)

Nutt, Alfred, ‘The Fairy Mythology of English Literature: Its Origin and Nature’, *Folklore*, Vol. 8, 1 (1897), 29-53

Orgel, Stephen, ‘Margins of Truth’, in *The Renaissance Text*, ed. by Andrew Murphy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 91-107

Ortego II, James N., 'Seeking the Medieval in Shakespeare: The Order of the Garter and the Topos of Derisive Chivalry', *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 35 (2010), 80-104

Owen, D. D. R., ‘Profanity and its Purpose in Chrétien’s *Cligés* and *Lancelot*’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 6, 1 (1970), 37-48

Paris, Gaston, ‘Etudies sur les romans de la Table Ronde : Lancelot du Lac, II’, *Romania*, Vol. 12, 48 (1883), 459-534

Pask, Kevin, *The Fairy Way of Writing* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013)

Patch, Howard Rollin, *The Other World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950)

Paton, Lucy Allen, *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance*, 2nd edn. (New York: Burt Franklin, 1960)

Patterson, Lee, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (London: Routledge, 1991)

Peachman, John, ‘Links between *Mucedorus* and *The Tragical History, Admirable Achievements and Various Events of Guy Earl of Warwick*’, *Notes and Queries*, Vol. 53, 4 (2006), 464-7

Peebles, Rose J., *The Legend of Longinus in Ecclesiastical Tradition and in English Literature and Its Connection with the Grail* (Baltimore: J. H. Furst, 1911)

Prescott, Paul, 'Shakespeare and Popular Culture', in *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. by Margreta de Grazia & Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 269-85

Publicover, Laurence, *Dramatic Geography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)

Purkiss, Diane, *The Witch in History* (London: Routledge, 1996)

----------, *Troublesome Things* (London: Penguin, 2000)

Putter, Ad, 'Knights and Cleric at the Court of Champagne: Chrétien de Troyes's Romances in Context', in *Medieval Knighthood V*, ed. by Stephen Church and Ruth Harvey (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), 243-66

----------, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and French Arthurian Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995)

----------, 'The influence of visions of the otherworld on some medieval romances', in *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Carolyn Muessig and Ad Putter (London: Routledge, 2007), 237-51

Rathborne, Isabel, E., *The Meaning of Spenser's Fairyland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937)

Reinhard, John Revell, *The Survival of Geis in Medieval Romance* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1933)

Richardson, Christine, and Jackie Johnston, *Medieval Drama* (New York: Macmillan, 1991)

Riddell, James, and Stanley Stewart, *Jonson's Spenser* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1995)

Robertson Jr., D. W., 'The Doctrine of Charity in Mediaeval Literary Gardens', *Speculum*, Vol. 26 (1951), 24-49

----------, *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962)

----------, 'The Concept of Courtly Love as an Impediment to the Understanding of Medieval Texts', in *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, ed. by F. X. Newman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1968), 1-18

Rooney, Anne, *Hunting in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993)

Russell, J. Stephen, *The English Dream Vision* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988)

Saunders, Corrine, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010)

Schmidt, Michael, *The Novel* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2014)

Scott, Walter, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

Scott-Warren, Jason, *Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005)

Shell, Alison, *Shakespeare and Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010)

Siegel, Paul N., 'Shakespeare and the Neo-Chivalric Cult of Honor', *The Centennial Review*, Vol. 8, 1 (1964), 39-70

Sisson, C. J., 'A Topical Reference in *The Alchemist*', in *Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies*, ed. by James McManaway et al. (Washington D. C., Folger Shakespeare Library, 1948), 739-41

Smith, Roland M., 'Spenser's Irish River Stories', *PMLA*, Vol. 50, 4 (1935), 1047-56

Somerset, Fiona and Nicholas Watson (eds.), *The Vulgar Tongue* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003)

Spearing, A. C., *The Gawain-Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970)

----------, *Medieval Dream Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976)

----------, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

----------, 'Sir Orfeo: Madness and Gender', in *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, ed. by Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert (London: Routledge, 2013), 258-72

Spence, Lewis, *British Fairy Origins* (London: Watts, 1946)

Spyra, Piotr, 'Ben Johnson's *The Alchemist*: The Essential Guide to Early Modern Fairy Belief', *Folklore*, Vol. 128, 3 (2017) 292-313

Stenner, Rachel, Tamsin Badcoe, and Gareth Griffith (eds.), *Rereading Chaucer and Spenser* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019)

Stone, Lawrence, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558–1642* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965)

Strite, Sheri Ann, '*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: To Behead or Not to Behead – That *Is* a Question', *Philological Quarterly*, Vol. 70 (1991), 1-12

Sweeney, Michelle, *Magic in the Medieval Romance from Chrétien de Troyes to Geoffrey Chaucer* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000)

Tambling, Jeremy, *Confession* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990)

Taylor, Charles, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989)

Thomas, Keith, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971)

Thompson, Stith and Jonas Balys, *The Oral Tales of India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958)

Tolkien, J. R. R., ‘On Fairy-Stories’, in *Tales from the Perilous Realm* (London: HarperCollins, 2008)

Topsfield, L. T., *Chrétien de Troyes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977)

Tuve, Rosemond, *Allegorical Imagery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966)

Twomey, Michael W., 'The *Gawain*-poet', in *Readings in Medieval Texts*, ed. by David Johnson and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 273-87

Vendryus, Jean, ‘Les éléments celtiques de la légende du Graal.’ *Etudes Celtiques*, Vol. 5 (1949), 1-50

Vinaver, Eugene, *The Rise of Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971)

Wade, James, *Fairies in Medieval Romance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

Wall, Wendy, *Staging Domesticity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Warton, Thomas, *Observations on the Fairy Queen of Spenser*, 2nd ed. (London, 1807)

Watkins, C. S., *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Watson, Curtis Brown, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1960)

Watson, Nicholas, ‘Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409’, *Speculum*, Vol. 70 (1995), 822-64

Watt, Tessa, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Pres, 1991)

Wiggins, Martin, and Catherine Richardson, *British Drama, 1533-1642*, 9 Vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)

Willard, Thomas, 'Pimping for the Fairy Queen', in *Crime and Punishment in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, ed. by Albrecht Classen and Connie Scarborough (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 491-508

Williams, David, *Deformed Discourse* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996)

Williams, Mark, 'Magic and Marvels', in *The Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, ed. by Geraint Evans and Helen Fulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 52-72

Williams, Noel, 'The Semantics of the Word Fairy', in *The Good People*, ed. by Peter Narváez (New York: Garland, 1991), 457-78

Wilson, Jean, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1980)

Wood, Juliette, 'The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature', *Cambridge Medieval Welsh Studies*, Vol. 10 (Winter, 1985), 25-38

Woods, Susanne, 'Spenser and the Problem of Women's Rule', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 48, 2 (1985), 141-58

Woodcock, Matthew, 'The Fairy Queen Figure in Elizabethan Entertainments', in *Elizabeth I*, ed. by Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney and Debra Barrett-Graves (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 97-115

----------, *Fairy in The Faerie Queene* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004)

----------, ‘The End of Chivalry? Survivals and Revivals of the Tudor Age’, in *A Companion to Chivalry*, ed. by Robert W. Jones and Peter Coss (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2019), 281-300

Woodhouse, A. S. P., ‘Nature and Grace in *The Faerie Queene*’, *ELH*, Vol. 16 (1949), 194-228

Wooding, Jonathan M. (ed.), *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000)

Wrightson, Keith, ''Sorts of People' in Tudor and Stuart England', in *The Middling Sort of People*, ed. by Jonathan Barry & Christopher Brooks (London: MacMillan: 1994), 28-51

Yates, Frances, *Shakespeare’s Last Plays* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975)

Young, Helen, *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2015)